



H.I.H. SULTÁN MÁSÚD MÍRZÁ, ZILLU'S-SULTÁN, AS A GRAND COMMANDER  
OF THE STAR OF INDIA.

PERSIAN CHILDREN OF  
THE ROYAL FAMILY  
THE NARRATIVE OF AN ENGLISH TUTOR  
AT THE COURT OF H.I.H. ZILLU'S-SULTÁN,  
G.C.S.I. *By* WILFRID SPARROY    

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# PERSIAN CHILDREN OF THE ROYAL FAMILY

## CHAPTER I

### MY FIRST MORNING AT THE ZILLU'S-SULTÁN'S COURT

THE roses had flung all their brief petals to the summer breeze, and the opium-fields were a waving mass of white poppies with a patch of purple here and there, when the carriage, which his Imperial Highness Zillu's-Sultán had sent to meet me at Natanz, the golden pear garden of Persia, bowled through the wayside bazaars on the skirts of the city of Isfahán, with its flashing blue-domed Mosque of Sháh 'Abbás the Great. Out there to the north, whence we had come, rises the snow-capped peak of the Karku's Kúh, or Vulture Mountain, and I knew from the position of the sun that the time must be about two hours after his rising. Of that mountain, which might be said to be the single limit to the sight in the unexampled

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purity and brightness of the air, my companion related that when the waters of the Deluge were subsiding, and had sunk one yard below the summit of Karku's Kúh (11,000 feet high), Noah let loose various birds out of his ark, but only the vulture was strong enough to fly to the crest, all the other birds dying from the unaccustomed exposure to the elements. This story of his bore me clean back to the patriarchal ages on its prehistoric breath, and so I settled myself comfortably in my corner of the carriage, and did my best to believe that I was in a chariot of a period not less remote than that of Cyrus. Our carriage, however, a roomy brougham, lined with crimson velvet, and bearing on its panels the national emblem of the Lion and the Sun, had been built in London quite recently, and was drawn by four mettlesome stallions of a chestnut hue, two of which were ridden by *kaliskahchis*, or postilions. The box-seat was empty, and a *gholdm*, an outrider, with a long carbine slung obliquely across his back, led the way on a cob of a flea-bitten grey.

My companion, a *yávar*, or major, in the Zillu's-Sultán's Cossacks—a regiment distinguished by a tall hat of white lambskin,—employed his time by rolling for me a string of cigarettes in the shape of sugar-loaves, while my road-servant, *Sádik*, served as interpreter between us. Every now and then the latter, who had played as many parts in his day as that inimitable scamp “Hajji Baba of Ispahan,” would take it upon himself to lend me his advice at a rate

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of interest not exceeding 75 per cent.—as when, for instance, he implored me to give the major a tip at parting, and claimed a new suit of clothes as a reward for the gratuitous hint. I opened my eyes as wide as they would go on purpose to let my amazement glide through them. I eyed the presumably unconscious officer, in all the glory of his blue and red uniform of a European cut, and shook my head energetically as who should say, “I wouldn’t insult him for all the world !” Nor did I yield to the almost overmastering force of Śádik’s exposition of the customs of his country, until I noticed that the major was armed, not with a sword, as one would expect from his rank, but with a Martini-Henry rifle, which he carried between his knees so long as he was in the carriage ; and even then my face flew the red flag on giving him my sole remaining English sovereign, saying, “ This, the last rose of summer, is the portrait of my Sovereign Lady Queen Victoria ; please to accept it as such in memory of our delightful picnic.”

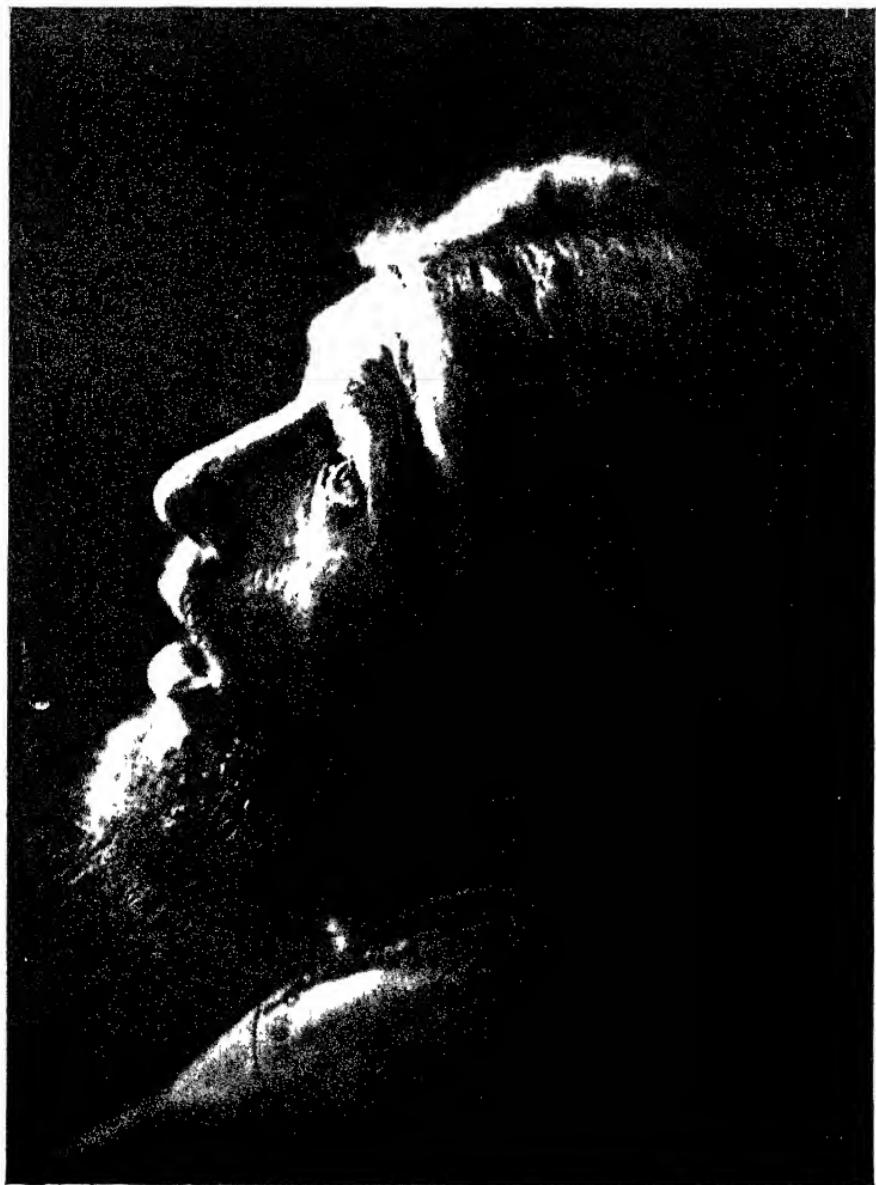
Entering the avenue of Chahár Bágh, or Four Gardens, at a gallop, we passed through the gateway on the outskirts of the palace enclosure into a paved street, between walls of sun-baked clay and chopped straw, which was lined with mendicant cripples of both sexes. One unfortunate fellow, a leper, raised his handless arms as the imperial equipage rolled by, and sang praises to Alláh in a loud voice. Another leper, a woman whose feet were eaten away to rāggéd

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stumps, squatted on the ground, and, beating the pavement with her hands, cried in plaintive minor tones, “*Allâh nejât versin!*” These words, “May God give you salvation,” she repeated again and again, until at last Şâdîk, who had charge of the money-bag, threw a few silver *kráns* to her little daughter, who was trotting alongside the carriage. I think I never saw so pretty a child for all her rags and unkempt appearance. She wore no veil, and her lively little face looked as sweet and as luscious as a ripe nectarine in the sun.

“*Mâsha’llâh!*” she cried, in a ringing treble, as she pattered along beside us, “who is the Şâhib? Tell me, that my mother may bear witness to his generosity at the hour of midday prayer.”

Şâdîk thrust his head out of the window. “My Şâhib is the slave of God,” he replied, a broad grin on his humorous face. Farther on, a wild-looking dervish, naked from crown to sole save a linen cloth about the loins, emerged from the crowd of merchants and *mullâs* on their way to the bazaars and mosques, and pursued our carriage down the street, turning somersaults and brandishing his bludgeon as he ran, and giving voice the while to his customary cry of “*Hu hakk! hu hakk!*” (“Due! due!”), which sounded much more like a challenge than a petition for alms. The major assured me that the dervish was mad, for which reason, as it would appear from the major’s voice of awe, he was held in peculiar reverence by his countrymen. At the gateway of the palace of



HEAD OF A PERSIAN DFRVISH.



## At the Zillu's-Sultán's Court

*Chahil Sutún*, or Forty Pillars, two officers in sky-blue uniforms gave me a military salute. In the street, the blind, the halt, the leprous, and the poor ; over the Zillu's-Sultán's walls wealth beyond the dreams of avarice : a town of ancient monuments all crumbling in ruins, and princely gardens and palaces unequalled in their sweet simplicity and Oriental splendour :—so wags the world from the Caspian Sea to the Persian Gulf, prince and priest vying with each other in the pursuit of the almighty *túmdán*.

It is not the custom for anybody, except his Highness the Shadow of the King, to drive or to ride through the gardens of *Chahil Sutún*, so we turned the corner in the direction of the Square of Four Tanks, one of the courtyards within the old palace grounds. Our postillions were negotiating the turning—no easy matter in the press of the crowd—when five weedy black eunuchs, mounted on Arab thoroughbreds, spirited and white, came dashing past us at full speed over the rough paving-stones. They sat their horses boldly and well, they flourished their wooden staves with an air of self-importance, and they shrieked to the passers-by to turn their faces to the wall, lest they might happen to catch sight of the prince's ladies of the harem, who were following in the wake, veiled and close-pent in their broughams.

Our outriders and postillions, drawing rein, sat as graved statues on their horses, their eyes fixed to the front. It was an exciting moment.

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“Thank God!” said Sádik, “the Sáhib has found favour in the sight of Alláh, who is good and gracious—he will see the wives of his Highness.”

To say that I shut my eyes, or that I turned my face to the cushions, would be to affect a virtue I was far from possessing. I rather rose to the occasion in more senses than one, and so did certain little folk in the other carriages. As each brougham drove by, a shining morning face appeared at the window, and gave me welcome.

“*Le voilà, notre maître!*” cried the first boy, flinging open the window, and popping out his head.

The second raised his tall hat of astrakhan. “*Enfin!*” he remarked. “*A tantôt, monsieur.*”

“*Soyez le bien-venu, sair,*” exclaimed the third, airing his sunny face and his knowledge of modern languages simultaneously.

The fourth, a vivid-looking youngster, Húmáyún Mírzá by name, almost pitched himself out of the window in his eagerness to give me greeting.

“*Je suis très content!*” he crowed;—“*très, mosie mon ami!*”

This breathless welcome at the end of my long journey by sea and land, encouraged me to show myself at the window. “*C'est très gentil à vous d'être venu—merci!*” I replied to each one on returning his salute. Then the carriages passed out of sight round the corner, and we moved on. It was a dramatic meeting. The princesses of the imperial harem, as I had seen in a flash, were thickly veiled from head

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to foot in their white linen *rúbands* and nun-like *cháddars* of black satin :—the first is an impenetrable veil covering the face and bosom, and the second a long sheet concealing the whole person.

On reaching the Square of Four Tanks, we got out of the carriage, and the major led the way to the porch of the *andarún* (that is, the harem), a number of *naukars* (royal servants) rising to their feet and salaaming, as we walked by. There he introduced me to a tall, flabby man, with a hairless face, who rose, panting, from a *tákché*, or arched niche, at our approach. He wore a tall astrakhan *kuldáh* on his head, European brown boots, light blue trousers, a Persian frock-coat of light grey material, which fitted tight at the waist and fell in plaits innumerable to the shins. Reaching out for my hand, he held it in his, while he adorned his shrill periods with all the flowers of Persian rhetoric. His grasp was unspeakably nerveless and clammy. My new acquaintance was an individual of no less importance than his Excellency Aghá-Báshí, the chief of the eunuchs in the service of his imperial master, the Zillu's-Sultán.

The Aghá-Báshí is, I believe, the only Persian of his kind in the town of Isfahán, and holds a position at the Court which is only second in influence to that of his Highness, who spoke of him upon more than one occasion as his most trusty servant. He has three hobbies which he drives hard : namely, the breeding of horses, the cultivation of flowers, and the collecting of old Persian manuscripts. That he

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should be a skilled votary of the last pursuit is the more remarkable, because he can neither read nor write. For the rest, it will be enough to say now that his kindly though inert-looking face and his courteous manner combined to make me feel ashamed of the purely physical repulsion from his pulpy grip ; and, though I never rid myself of a certain loathing to take his hand, I bore him in friendly remembrance until nearly the end of my stay.

Leaving the Aghá-Báshí for the time being to exercise his governing abilities within the sacred portals of the Zill's harem, we strolled across the *tekyé*—a paved courtyard with open boxes all round and a stone daïs in the middle, reserved for the performance of the Shiah Passion-plays and for wrestling matches—and entered the compound of what appeared to be a private house. There the major left me with Sádik, and went in search of the key of another house which, as he avowed at starting, had been made ready for me. He was no sooner gone than a black eunuch came out of the house and salaamed : this movement he achieved by standing at ease and bowing low from the hips. He was slim and loosely strung together. While he was bending before me like a willow switch in a gust of wind, yet another ebony gentleman of the harem strode towards us from the *tekyé*.

The rascal Sádik burst out laughing. “Oh, Sáhib !” he gasped ; “when shall we see a man—yes, Sáhib ?”



PERSIAN WRESTLERS.



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"Here comes some sort of a man," I replied, struck by the new-comer's springy gait and self-reliant bearing.

Şádiķ gave him another quick look. "I ask pardon of God!" he cried in a voice of emphatic negation. "I know what for the Şáhib says that, but the Şáhib is too gracious. A man? No—no—no! may God pardon me, no! The eye of that harem-born slave says to Şádiķ, 'I wish you were what I am!' and Şádiķ is very angry—*bâlî!* [yes]."

"Not a bit of it, Şádiķ. He's a sportsman every inch of him. Are all eunuchs cruel and vindictive? Answer me that."

Şádiķ raised both his hands to his face, the palms upward——

"*Elbetteh, Şáhib, khailî!* Certainly, Şáhib, too much!" he asseverated in Persian and in English by way of emphasis.

"This one, then, is the exception that proves the rule. I like the looks of him. His bearing says as plain as speech, 'Though I be what I am, I will do all that would befit a man.' Who dares do more is none, Şádiķ."

"I ask pardon of God!" was the rascal's unconvinced reply; then the black slave appeared before us, and we held our tongues.

"*Es-selâmu 'aleykûm*" ("Peace be upon you"), he said, bowing.

"And upon thee peace," I replied, stretching out my hand.

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His flashing black eyes kindled with pride ; then, raising my hand to his lips, and from the lips to his forehead, in token of his allegiance and respect, he bade Şádik tell me that the Prince had expressed a command to see me at once.

I begged leave to be excused until I had had a wash and brush up.

“ *Lazem n’ist* : that is not necessary,” said Şádik, the omniscient. “ It will make glad the heart of the prince, if the Şáhib goes to him straight from the road. What for the Şáhib have a *hammdm* first ? Persian people not English people. The Prince first, the *hammdm* second—*bali* ! The Persians go to the Prince *khaili faurdn* :—too soon—very quick—at once—*bali* ! What for the Şáhib not show the Prince he is very soon, very quick to obey ! ”

“ So be it,” I replied ; “ I am the Prince’s slave and his sacrifice ! If dust and dirt be the outward sign of zeal, his Highness should regard me as the most zealous of his servants.”

Then Şádik, taking compassion upon my crest-fallen appearance, assured me by my death that I was about to see a proper man at last.

I left the rascal hugging himself in the infallibility of his judgment, and followed the Prince’s messenger, who proved to be, as I had divined from his masterful bearing, not only a perfect horseman, but also a first-rate shot and a promising athlete.

Threading our way through the crowd of idle naukars, who were either smoking the *kalydn* or

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lounging about, we skirted the Garden of Firs, around which the ministerial offices range, and made for the courtyard of the *Diván-Kháné*, all the entrances of which were guarded by sentries, whose duties appeared to sit very lightly upon them. Our way lay through a curtained porch. At sight of us the soldier on sentry go, who was squatting on the ground and sucking meditatively at his hubble-bubble, leaped to his feet, laid hold of his rifle, and presented arms, while my companion, drawing aside the curtain, bade me to pass through in the name of Alláh the Merciful and Clement.

I found myself in a court open to the sapphire sky. At first I could see but dimly, for the sunshine was so dazzling as almost to deprive me of the use of one sense, while the perfume of countless flowers beguiled another in a fashion so dreamy and so seductive as almost to deceive into the belief that I had strayed by mistake into the boudoir of some Persian princess. But when my eyes had accustomed themselves to the light, I saw that the compound was oblong in shape, and tricked out in guise of a garden. A paved way runs round the four walls ; all the windows are shaded with awnings embroidered with the national emblem of the Sun rising over the Lion's back ; and colour and light hold possession everywhere save where the canvas casts its grateful shade and cool. The playing of water, most soothing of sounds in a dry land, was the next thing to attract my attention. Turning in the direction of the splash,

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I discovered a fountain in the middle of the daïs spanning the court at one of the narrower ends. The water rose to a considerable height, then fell into a shallow basin of porphyry in which goldfish were darting hither and thither. Bees, wasps, and hornets flew, buzzing, from flower to flower: they struck me as being at once bigger and more brilliant in colour than the European species. Facing the dais, at the other and the narrower end, is a wall painted in red and blue arabesque, and covered all over with the strongly keeled horns of the Persian ibex, or bezoar goat, which had fallen to the Prince's gun. The *Díván-Khâne* occupies two wings at right angles to each other: the longer one runs from end to end of the compound, and faces a blank wall pierced by two curtained door-ways—the entrances to the sacred precincts of the harem; the other and the shorter wing is built along the daïs.

The black slave and I walked in the shade of the awnings, and, ascending the daïs, climbed up a flight of stone steps, each one of which seemed to be at least thirty inches high, and entered an ante-chamber. Half a dozen *mullds* in white turbans and two *Seyyids* in their head-dress of dark blue were sitting on their heels around the room, their hands and feet hidden in the ample folds of their rusty-brown cloaks. The room was filled with silence. A collection of shoes of every kind, shape, colour and size was neatly arranged on the door-sill without. The men within showed no signs of restlessness, as they waited for the

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word that should summon them to the Prince, for patience is rather a habit than a virtue in a country where time and eternity are regarded as one. The Aryan Persian's attitude towards life is the attitude of Browning's grammarian.

"We mistrust and say, 'But time escapes :  
Live now or never !'

He says, 'What's time ? Leave Now for dogs and apes !  
Man has Forever.'"

The European, living in the present, makes haste to grow rich ; to him time is money. The Persian, *per contra*, being of a more abstract and contemplative turn of mind, decides not to "live, but know." And so he sits him down beside the banks of Time, and watches the river of years as it flows into the ocean of Eternity, and ("soul-hydroptic with a sacred thirst") sucks at the flagon of metaphysical speculation. Life is a dream to him, and, though the interpretations thereof differ, the upshot is one—death is the awakening.

These thoughts you are to conceive as being inspired by the philosophic composure of the *Seyyids* and *mullahs* before they became aware of my presence ; but no sooner did they see me, than their grave and meditative demeanour suffered a lightning change. The descendants of the Prophet, eyeing me askance as I walked by, muttered the commonest term of abuse in their teeth. That a son of a burned father, like myself, should take precedence of men who could claim kinship with the inspired camel-driver, as it

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was their pride to boast, would appear to have been a stretch beyond their mood of philosophic toleration. Their faces glowed with fanaticism as with a flame ; the which perceiving, I sought to smooth down their ruffled spirits, by covering my good-fortune with the open sesame of Persian etiquette—“*Bism’lláh’r-Rahmáni’r-Rahím* : In the name of the Merciful God and Clement ! ” ere I followed my guide into the marble gallery traversing the first floor of the *Diván-Kháné* from one end to the other.

On the left, as you enter, are the windows of a suite of apartments ; on the right, those commanding a view of the garden below. The athletic eunuch, entering the Prince’s audience-chamber, the last room but one, left me standing in the gallery.

The Zillu’s-Sultán, as I could see through the window, was sitting at his ease, on white satin cushions, with his legs tucked under him, and held in his hand a silver-mounted stick. Opposite to him, at a respectful distance, was squatting on his heels a big fat priest in a long henna-dyed beard, who had wrung from the helpless taxpayers of the province a snug little fortune of not less than 15,000,000 *túmáns*, or £3,000,000 sterling, at the then rate of exchange. The privilege of sitting on his heels was a tribute paid to wealth by the senior brother of the *Sháhínsháh*. In the foreground, and behind the royal couch, stood a goodly number of officers and courtiers ; every head was bent in homage, every hand folded as a mark of respect. To one of

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these gentlemen-in-waiting, the Prince, returning my military salute, gave an abrupt order in Persian. Whereupon a grizzled ancient of a tawny complexion and a bilious eye, separating himself from his companions, joined me in the marble hall, and escorted me to the adjoining apartment, which proved to be the young princes' school-room.

The walls of this room were hung with mural maps made in Germany ; six round marble tables served as desks ; and a single arithmetical sum on the blackboard in a corner symbolized the truth of my previous reflections, that Persian princes, "greedy for quick returns of profit," are apt to misapply the golden rule of Compound Division. I was not a little pleased, in my unwashed condition, to perceive that my pupils were conspicuous by their absence.

When we had sat down face to face at one of the marble tables, my companion, leaning forward, laid hold of my hand, and held it tight. Then he adjusted his gold-rimmed spectacles with the other hand, and thus addressed me in English :—

"I have the advantage of you in knowing your name and position," he said in undertones. "That is not fair to you. Our intercourse will be the more friendly, perhaps, if I begin by introducing myself and by informing you of the reason of my being here. Know, then, that I am an Afghan prince of the blood, the reigning Amír, who is to all intents and purposes a usurper, having the honour to be my cousin-german. My name and title are Iskandar

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Khán. His Imperial Highness Zillu's-Sultán has been graciously pleased to appoint me his deputy until he shall be at leisure to welcome you to his Court himself. At the present moment he is busy holding audience. Conscious as I am of being but a sorry substitute for the elder brother of the Asylum of the Universe, it is nevertheless a pleasure to me, who spent many years in England in my early manhood, to return in your favour a quota of the acts of kindness and courtesy which I received from your compatriots in my exile. . . .”

I tried to free my hand with as little ado as might be, smiling all the while and trying to look happy ; but he simply would not let it loose.

“ Permit me to offer you my best congratulations,” he continued, establishing an even more affectionate claim upon my hand, “ on the influential and honourable appointment you now hold. Please God, it will prove to be, as it were, the stepping-stone to your promotion to a similar position in the service of Her Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria. For, truly, the Zillu's-Sultán is a prince of admirable virtues, of untiring energies, and of the most exalted abilities. Now there are three men of mark in the East : the first is the Sultan of Turkey, the second is my cousin of Afghanistan, and the third is His Highness the Shadow of the King. Why God, who is knowing and wise, has not bestowed upon so great a prince a government equally great, is exceedingly perplexing to my human understanding. But what I will call

## At the Zillu's-Sultán's Court

God's secret motive in withholding the title to the supreme power is something more than a puzzle and a perplexity to my understanding ; it comes near as well to cause me to despair of the future progress and prosperity of Persia. Pray pardon my platitudes, but you will judge for yourself. I have no doubt whatever that your verdict will be at one with mine. . . .”

He released my hand at last, in order to emphasize the conviction by banging the table with his clenched fist. I took care to keep my hands under the marble slab, and Iskandar Khán, deprived of his toy, resumed his grandiloquent discourse.

“Yes, Sir Tutor,” he said, in a somewhat reproachful tone of voice, “it is certainly a strange fate that a man should be set on the shelf for no other reason than because he was found to be wanting in none of the qualities which go to the making of a great ruler. Consider the Zillu's-Sultán's destiny. Weighed in the balances with his compeers, it was they, and not the Zillu's-Sultán, who kicked the beam, and therefore he was humbled and they were exalted ! . . . Some one had blundered. But who ? —that's the question. Certainly not our Prince, than whom His late Majesty Násiru'd-Dín Sháh had no more faithful subject, and not a son who was half so devoted. Who, then ? Ay, that's the question, of course. You may think I am prejudiced now. You will not think so when you come to know the Prince. His generosity, unfathomable as the

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sea, has this advantage over that unstable element, that it is far less capricious. . . . It may be said of him that he is untiring in his loyal services to his younger brother, who now sits upon the throne of these ancient realms."

In replying to this long speech of the Afghan prince, I told the simple truth that the Zillu's-Sultán is, by the consent of the majority of Europeans in his country, by far the most popular prince in Persia, and that his name would long live in the memories of all Englishmen as that of the chief patron of British enterprise and trade. Here Iskandar Khán, taking my hand captive by stealth, held it fast once more.

"Listen!" he cried; "I will give you an example of his imperial generosity. He compliments me with a pension of 3000 *túmdáns* a year for the pleasure I derive from conversing with him once a week." He paused, overcome with emotion; and then, as if to overwhelm me with his brilliancy as a conversationalist, he skimmed lightly over the surface of European politics, theology, literature, and manners. Now he was epigrammatic and witty, now shrewd and satirical. "France," said he, "only awaits a man. . . . The Mother Church of England nestles in the bosom of her daughters;—but where are her sons? . . . The Church of Rome is bound to fall one day: sooner or later she will sink under the burden of her accumulative improbabilities. . . . Russia is drawn irresistibly to the East as if by her

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instinctive yearning to behold the sun ! . . . Englishmen are the salt of the world, for do not they rule the waves ? . . . Shakespeare was born great, Doctor Johnson achieved greatness, and poor Boswell had greatness thrust upon him. . . . All Persians are Unitarians : remember that. . . .”

I took advantage of the first lull to assure him that the pension he received from the Zillu's-Sultán appeared to me to be the reward of merit, his mind, as was proved by his conversation, being of wit and wisdom all compact.

“ As a sincere admirer of the English character,” he returned, “ I consider his Highness is lucky to have secured the services of an English tutor who strikes me as being . . . ”

I burst out laughing at the pitter-patter of unblushing flattery which came tripping from his tongue with the unctuous grace that characterizes the Eastern courtier. My laughter seemed to please him, for he joined in heartily enough.

“ You English gentlemen are all of a piece,” he said at last, wiping a bilious eye. “ I would compare you to a Martini-Henry rifle : as true and as polished as steel, you inspire confidence in the breast of the timid and suspicious ; the best of your kind, you go point-blank to the mark ; and you were all turned out in the same foundry. . . . By-the-by, are you an Oxford or a Cambridge man ? ”

We were in the heat of an argument over the Eastern question, when the athletic eunuch re-entered

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the room, and salaamed, saying that the Prince requested me "to take the brightness of my presence" into his private apartments. Thither I followed Iskander Khán, who told me to take off my hat and to follow the customs of my country when in the presence of the Zill.

Sultán Másúd Mírzá, Prince Felicitous, better known to fame by his title of Zillu's-Sultán, or Shadow of the King, was born in the year 1850. Consequently, he is three years older than his brother, the reigning Sháh, whose royal birth on his mother's side gave him the prior claim to the Persian throne; for the Zill's mother, the 'Iffatu'd-Daulat, Chastity of the Kingdom, far from being a princess of the House of Kájár, was the daughter of Musi Rízá Beg, who was an outrider in the service of the late Sháh's uncle, Bahmán Mírzá. The Zillu's-Sultán, while still a boy, was made the Governor-General of Isfahán; then province after province was added to his dominions, until, in the year 1886, two-fifths of the whole of Persia were subject to his almost sovereign sway. From his palace in Isfahán his power extended over the districts of Gulpaigan and Khonsar, Toshagan, Irak, Isfahán, Fars, Yezd, Arabistán, Luristán, Kurdistán, Kangavar, Nihavend, Kamareh, Burujird, Kermansháh, Asadabád and Kezzaz. The revenue of these dominions amounted in the same year (1886) to some £599,400 in cash and £73,800 in grain, a total of £673,200 sterling. His standing army of over 21,000 men was well drilled and well



THE ZILLU'S-SULTÁN AS NIMROD.



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equipped, and might be said to have been the immediate cause of his sudden downfall in the month of February, 1888, because of the jealousy it excited both in St. Petersburg and at the seat of the Central Government in Teheran. The Grand Vizier, the Aminu's-Sultán, fanned the lambent flame with so skilful a hand as to kindle at last the suspicions of Násiru'd-Dín Sháh, who, summoning his "well-beloved first-born" to his Court, dispossessed him of all his provinces save that of Isfahán. This was all I knew of the Zillu's-Sultán's history on finding myself face to face with him for the first time.

The general effect of the room we entered was that of soldierly simplicity and order. The panelled ceiling was of polished chenar wood ; the walls of white porphyry were bare ; and the floor was spread with Persian carpets of unimaginable beauty, the mere sight of which inspired me with the veneration of youth in the presence of age. There were three chairs, on one of which was seated a man whose masterful bearing proclaimed him to be the Shadow of the King. Behind his chair stood Dr. Mírzá Huseyn Khán in white socks, a linen frock-coat of the Persian cut, a fez of black felt, and a European collar and tie. I paused on the threshold, and bowed to the Zillu's-Sultán.

Picture to yourself a square head set deep on square shoulders—the neck being so short as to be indistinguishable,—a square block of a body almost as broad as it is long, and as deep as it is broad, and

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you will have some idea of the too solid proportions of the Prince. No matter where you stand and look at him, from the front or the rear or the side, you will see a massive trunk that is a solid square, all but ; nor will you be the first to pause and marvel how he had come to receive the title of the Shadow of the King, since he, like Falstaff, must have been born with something of a round belly. Notice his legs, also, which are short and round and fat, swollen, it may be, with gout. His face in repose is undeniably strong, tenacious, almost truculent ; in the presence of his equals, it puts on a mistrustful look, keen and astute—an expression which yields to a broad smile of good-humour in the congenial company of his inferiors. He was dressed in a frock-coat of Persian cashmere, white summer trousers, and patent leather shoes with silver buckles—it is worth mentioning, perhaps, that I never saw him in his socks, much less barefoot in the house. His headgear was a *tâj*, or felt cap, gaudily embroidered with *Kur'ân* texts. One hand held the silver-mounted stick, the other lay flat on his knee. Tapping one of the vacant chairs with his stick, the Zillu's-Sultán, who knows a word or two of French, cried out, in abrupt staccato tones—

“*Venez ici ; asseyez-vous !*” Then he turned to the doctor, and bade him be seated also, saying, “*Et vous aussi, docteur.*” So we sat down side by side, facing the Prince.

I was wondering where Iskandar Khán would

## At the Zillu's-Sultán's Court

find a place, when he rushed forward, fell on his knees, and bowed his forehead to the marble floor, for all the world like a Mussulman saying his prayers in the sixth position. This frenzy of humility in a pretender to the throne of Afghanistán struck me as having a Gilbertian touch of humour. Try as I would I could not restrain a smile which broadened into a grin on my calling back to memory his recent speech : “ His Imperial Highness Zillu's-Sultán compliments me with a pension of 3000 *túmáns* a year for the pleasure I derive from conversing with him once a week.” The Prince, catching my eye, smiled an enigmatic smile. It was not altogether a smile of self-complacency. It was rather the self-congratulatory smile of a stage-manager who reads in the face of his audience the unqualified success of a somewhat daring piece of business. The curt word “ Begone ! ” brought the Afghan prince to his feet. There was a dash of dignity and pathos in his departing figure.

I began by apologizing for appearing in his presence in my travel-stained riding kit. The Zill, scrutinizing me from the crown of my head to the soles of my top-boots, waved an imperial hand and smiled an imperial smile. “ Pa-pa-pa-pa-pa ! ” he cried, in a voice of the warmest admiration ; “ tell the *Şáhib* to be of good-cheer : he is quite suitably attired—for a tutor ! ” My sense of humour overcame my sense of awe, and I burst out laughing.

During the interview, that lasted about a quarter of an hour, I kept an observant eye upon the Prince's

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face, which wore an expression of frank inquisitiveness, heightened by his questions as to my age, and height, and family history. His eyes are remarkable, and odd in the sense of being ill-matched: while the one is kept wide-open in a bold unflinching stare, a drooping lid lends to the other the effect of a wink, shrewd and calculating. There was not a breath of rudeness in the manner in which he turned the conversation upon myself and my private concerns. He seemed to be desirous to satisfy his curiosity and put me at my ease, and nothing more. I entered into the spirit of these aims with such goodwill that my replies, as interpreted by Dr. Mírzá Huseyn Khán, elicited many a burst of laughter from the Prince. Whereas his remarks were always to the point, his questions had reference to nothing in particular: they were invariably *à propos de boute*. Thus he broke off in the middle of a flowery oration in the praise of English grit and go, in order to ask me whether my father had given me a farewell present or not. My reply, though it was distinctly unfair to my father, had the saving grace of jumping with the Prince's humour, which was nothing if not hearty.

"Oh, certainly, sir," I replied; "my father gave me a cigarette!"

I knew well enough that I laid myself open to a downright imperial snub, and perhaps I had deserved to get it. Be this as it may, two things are certain. First, that it is pardonable even

## At the Zillu's-Sultán's Court

in a tutor to find his duties a more interesting topic of conversation than his family affairs. Secondly, that the Zillu's-Sultán, taking the poor little joke in good part, laughed till the tears ran down his face. The characteristic trait of his somewhat perplexing nature is that not even a joke at his own expense (provided it be no gibe) can dash his sense of humour; and this is a feature which is every whit as lovable as it is rare. You may look for it among a thousand princes all the world over, and you will find it in never a one of them all. The sole return exacted for this proof of munificent bonhomie is a sense of humour equally catholic in his companion.

As for my duties, he gave me a free hand, saying—

“ Besides teaching my sons English and French, and the elements of mathematics and science, I wish you to do your utmost to inculcate in them a love of truth and honour, for those virtues are more common in England than they are in Persia. Do not forget that you are the spiritual father of my sons. Though they are the light of my eyes, they are only boys, and require to be reduced to discipline. To that end you may rely upon my support, adopt what methods you may. If you will take my advice, you will not spoil them by sparing ‘the sticks.’ For the rest, please to consider yourself as my guest until you are settled in your house. Your meals shall be sent over to you from the royal cooking-house. I will also send you a couple of soldiers, who shall act as your body-guard.

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You must be tired after your long journey. To regain your strength a three days' rest will be necessary. I hope the air and the water of Isfahán will agree with your health ; they are the best in Persia, and the purest. Dr. Mírzá Huseyn Khán will now escort you to your abode."

The Zillu's-Sultán, so ending, rose to his feet, and, after shaking me by the hand, paced slowly and solemnly from the room.

"What is your first impression of the Prince ?" said the doctor.

"I like him immensely," I replied.

And so I do.

## CHAPTER II

### “TO-MORROW, PLEASE GOD !”—A STUDY IN THE PERSIAN APPARATUS

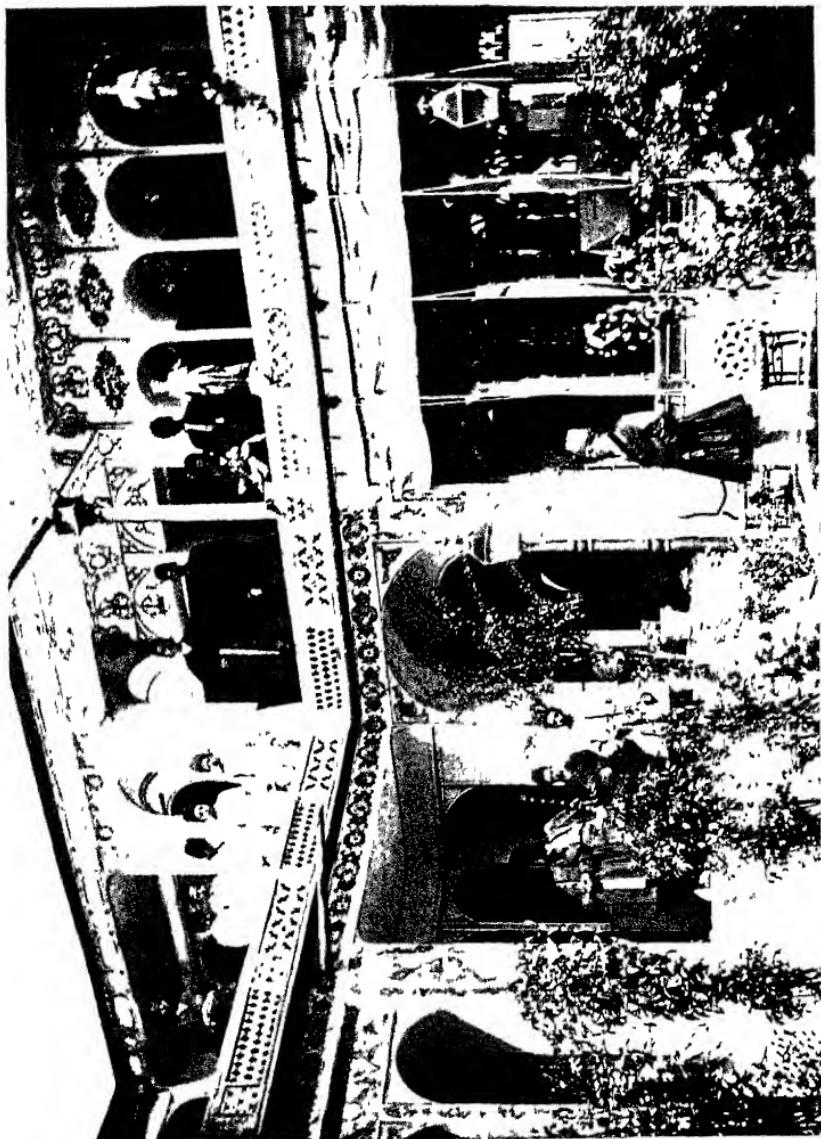
WHEN I arrived at the Zillu’s-Sultán’s court I was reduced to skin and bone by malaria and dysentery, but was strong in the hope that my troubles were over at last. This hope, kindled by the Zill’s forethought in dispatching the coach-and-four to meet me at Natanz, was confirmed by his humorous, informal reception, which I described at some length in the preceding chapter. Despite his calculating eye and massive jaw, his tenacious mouth and rasping metallic voice, he had made a favourable impression upon me. I took a liking to him for all his bluff inquisitiveness, because his smile, although more rare than his harsh, inharmonious laugh, was singularly pleasing, softening the hard lines in his masterful face, and bidding the hasty judge to pause. But the interview over, my rising hopes were dashed rudely to the depths. My companion, Dr. Mírzá Huseyn Khán, and I, crossing the flowery courtyard of the Dívan-Kháné, entered the compound of the *tekyé* once more. There we

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found my road-servant, Sádik, who was the cynosure of neighbouring eyes, courtiers, soldiers, and servants regarding him with undisguised mistrust. Sádik, tugging at his moustache, bore himself right manfully under the fire of those hostile eyes, his demeanour being a happy mixture of the contemptuous and the bland. He wore a pale green doublet, sky-blue trousers, yellow European gaiters and boots, a broad cartridge-belt round the waist, and a lean old-fashioned carbine (warranted to do no mischief at thirty paces), slung obliquely across his shoulders. But what lent to his appearance the touch of a civilization at once alien and unrighteous, was the broad *terai* I had given him on the road. This hat it was that aroused the suspicions of the court officials and servants, and thrust the wearer of it beyond the pale of Moslem. When he saw me he swaggered forth to meet me. His handsome face was all beams ; mirth twinkled in his flashing eyes ; humour informed his wagging tongue ; and a certain jaunty, devil-may-care bearing set his critics at defiance. He begged permission to have speech of me. This being granted, Dr. Mírzá Huseyn Khán moved on, and, for the first time in twenty minutes, my nostrils were quit of the nauseating smell of patchouli.

“The major,” said Sádik, “has found the key of the Sáhib’s house, and, behold, the house is unfurnished.”

“Unfurnished !” I cried. “ Didn’t the major say it had been set in order for me ? ”



IN A MODERN PERSIAN MANSION AT ISFAHÁN.



## “To-morrow, please God!”

“*Balı* [yes], Şâhib. And Şâdîk said to him, ‘Whose house is that?’ And the major said, ‘It is the Şâhib’s.’ And Şâdîk said, ‘Is the Şâhib a dog that he should dwell there?’ And the major said, ‘It is ordered.’ Then Şâdîk very angry, *balı*, and said, ‘My Şâhib is English Şâhib. He will burn your father, but he will not live in that house.’ And the major said yet a second time, ‘It is ordered.’ Then Şâdîk burned his father, and his grandfather, and his great-grandfather, and defiled their graves, because the major had said that thing—*balı*! And the major said yet a third time, ‘Well . . . it is ordered.’ Then Şâdîk threw out his arms to the north and the south, and to the east and the west, and cried out in anger, saying, ‘Who shall order my Şâhib who is an English Şâhib? Your shadow is less than the shadow of a blade of grass in a barren place, and your breath as idle as the wind blowing in an empty grate. But my Şâhib sits in the shadow of the victorious Queen, whose breath is the life of many nations. At her command new seas are born, so humble your heart lest there should be no more dry places in the world. What! is your love of water so great that you would be drowned in the flood of her anger? Peace, small person!’ And behold the major was silent—*balı*; but the house of the Şâhib is even now as bare as the palm of this hand.”

I thought a fight might have upon me the effect of a tonic, and rejoiced exceedingly at the prospect: so, telling Şâdîk to fall to the rear without more words,

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I rejoined the doctor, who escorted me along a paved gallery, open to the cloudless sky, which leads to the famous gate of '*Ali Kāpī*', the Sublime Porte of Isfahán. The entrance to my house lay through two long narrow gardens, wild and unweeded, on the left of the gallery, into a compound some twenty-five yards square, around which the apartments ranged. A deep octagonal tank, full of stagnant water, stood in the middle of the quadrangle ; four beds of asters and roses, and other and more homely flowers, surrounded the tank at right angles ; and a number of lilac-trees formed a ring round each flower-bed. I cast a gloomy eye in the direction of the tank, and murmured of mosquitoes in the doctor's ear. The thought of the coming sundown, which should draw those sounding insects from their breeding-bed, was, as it were, an itch that no scratching could allay. Smells innumerable, some pleasant and some offensive, rose up on all sides, and contended for the mastery over my olfactory nerves. The fetid stench of the stagnant water, combined with the odour of the patchouli, put the open-air fragrance of the flowers to the blush of retreat, and breathed vilely in my nostrils of rottenness and decay. I sucked what comfort I might, and it proved to be more than a little, at the tip of a long cigar. O fragrant weed and staunch, a very Blucher for valour in the field, I threw thy bitter end into the tank of slimy waters, exuding green moisture ; but thy name, O Bahadur, is graved in the inmost recesses of my

## “To-morrow, please God!”

memory as the vanquisher supreme over a battalion of stenches in revolt! The air I breathed clamoured for thy fragrance as an antidote. The very ground I stood on was honeycombed in the chinks of the pavement with small round holes, the retreat of the scorpion and the tarantula. And this pestiferous place was to be my home for the next three years! The doctor's voice assured me of the fact. He was good enough to hope that I should be happy there. His sensual mouth framed itself, as it were, to a kiss of congratulation at my good-fortune. I called heaven to witness to the necessity of ransacking the Indies for cigars. I saw my solemn vows of thrift ascend to heaven in the smoke of twenty-two thousand Havanas. The doctor wore a puzzled expression of countenance. I lightened his veiled obtuseness by drawing his attention to the central feature of my face. That the tank should be cleansed of its impurity and refilled with fresh running water were his words of comfort to me. My spirits rose to the murmuring of a Welsh mountain torrent; I breathed a cheerful interrogative in his ear, which leaped to heaven on thy breath, O Bahadur—

“When?”

“To-morrow, please God!” was the glib reply. Behold me on earth again, my spirits sinking deeper than ever plummet sounded. As for my thoughts, they scuttled in my brain as rats scuttle in a trap. Alas, I was in Persia indeed! I consoled myself in secret with the reassurance that the scorpion had

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need be alert to catch me snoozing on its premises. The doctor, dismayed at my demeanour, which had withstood his unctuous, cooing tones, fell back on his reminiscences, declaring that my predecessor, an excitable septuagenarian Frenchman, had laid such store by the abode, that all the Zill's horses and all the Zill's men had been powerless to tear him away from its crumbling walls when his term of service was over. One had sworn, from the doctor's voice, toned to an auctioneer's appeal for a higher bid, that the property was being given away at what he considered the ridiculously small sum of fifty thousand *tumans* . . . and a bottle of scent. His voice rose to the height of his argument, and, upon my soul, I was sore put to it to maintain my critical composure, when he went on to relate how the ancient man of gore and glory had stood at the open window, a loaded revolver in each hand, screaming of death to the first man who should cross the threshold of the compound gateway. Not a soldier among the crowd without had dared to call in question the blood-thirsty threat of the peppery little man. Even the Commander-in-Chief of the Zill's soldiery had sought safety in retreat. "Little man," the French tutor, in the pride of his five-feet-two, had cried, "I care not a rap for you. If you dare to set foot inside my house, I'll blow your brains out with my pistol, the only way to treat a creature like you."

The story goes that the Zill, at his wits' end to devise a means of ousting monsieur, had appealed

## “To-morrow, please God!”

to arbitration, summoning to the Díván-Kháné a select committee of Europeans, who gave it as their conviction that the dismissal had been justifiable. I strode to the house to the martial strain of the Mar-sellaise, which rung like a clarion in my brain.

“So the little Frenchman had to yield to the European Concert?” I said, my foot on the door-step.

“Yes,” replied the doctor, smiling. “He took up his abode in Julfá three months ago, swearing to take your life upon your arrival.”

“He had better make haste, then,” said I, “or the mosquitoes will draw first blood. For myself, I should prefer his steel.” My courage sank to my boots on hearing that the warrior was a married man. It rose again on the swelling bosom of a popular air at the comforting information that the wife was an Englishwoman. “Let them all come!” (However, when I came across the Frenchman a few days after, nothing could exceed his courtesy. He was pleased to call me a *bon cheval de race*, and say that he was glad that it was I who was saddled with his duties, and not some broken-winded *rosse*, fit for the knackers!)

When we had passed eight rooms in review, I wanted to sit down, but could find no chair. The aspect of the apartments was one with the crumbling walls of the compound. It was plain enough, from the accumulated dust and litter, that no feet save ours had crossed the threshold since the doughty Frenchman had snorted his defiance at the Shadow

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of the King. Dirt and dilapidation held dominion everywhere. The arched niches in the thickness of each wall were spanned with spiders' webs ; the semi-cylinders of the groined ceilings were partly alive with flies ; some official of the spacious Court of Sháh 'Abbás Buzurg, a contemporary of Queen Elizabeth, must have toasted his toes at the wood fire which had given to the smoke-stained walls their first coating of discolouration ; and the windows, bursting from the sashes, threatened a fall to the clay-plastered floors : the guardians of the sacred gate had used to dwell there in the reign of the Great 'Abbás. Dr. Mírzá Huseyn Khán invited me to have a look at the *bálk-kháné*, or upper storey, but I craved leave to be excused. To scale the stairs to the inevitable disillusion was a stretch beyond my native curiosity. I rather accompanied the doctor to the only room that was furnished in the comfortless caravanserai. The furniture, however, was of the scantiest ; an ink-stained table, an arm-chair upholstered with tin-tacks and ticken, a rickety cane-bottomed settee ; those, presumably the cast-off properties of my predecessor, had been, as it were, pitchforked into a room black with the smoke and dust of centuries. Offering the armchair to my companion with a polite regard for his claim on my hospitality and a lively concern for the seat of my riding-breeches, I squatted myself upon the table as being less likely than the settee to bring me to the ground. Sádik stood in the background, discoursing

## “To-morrow, please God!”

of London drawing-rooms to the doctor’s head-servant, who was a miracle of corpulency and decorum. I reduced the loquacious rascal to silence with a look. The terrifying stillness grew : the doctor fidgeted in his seat as on a bed of needles ; and then the awful hush was broken, if my ears deceived me not, by a sound like the tearing of cloth. I made haste to follow up the advantage by asking if that were positively the house which had been made ready for me, and was met with a bare-faced affirmative. The point-blank refusal to waste my substance upon the restoration of ruins brought my learned and honourable friend within reach of his conscience. He said that his Imperial Highness would stand by the agreement.

“The letter of the agreement,” I said, “was that lodgings were to be provided, but not board ; neither the word *furnished* nor the word *unfurnished* is mentioned. I lay claim to the benefit of the doubt. I am bound by the agreement to obey his Highness only in such things as are reasonable. This is not a case in point. It is unreasonable in his Highness to look to me to restore the historic ruins of Sháh ’Abbás the Great. I had hoped for furnished apartments, nothing more, and behold me possessed of a caravanserai in ruins, stabling for fifty horses unfit for a dog to lie in, two flower-gardens run to seed, and a couple of orchards littered with fruit in decay, —a property, in fact, that it would take my three years’ income to furnish and restore completely, and

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I know not how many servants to keep it in order. Whether I should furnish the miscalled lodgings, or whether the prince should do so, may or may not be a moot point. Be that as it may, one thing at least is certain : no man in his senses would submit to having the tenancy of this dilapidated abode thrust upon him. For myself, I shall be content with a *minimum* of justice. Let his Highness furnish and restore the sunny wing of this deserted palace, and I will do my utmost to rid his property of the scorpions and spiders. The privilege of the last word belongs, so far as my interests are concerned, to Her Majesty's Legation in Teheran."

My learned and honourable friend, waxing conciliatory, feigned invulnerability to the sting in the tail of my remarks, by expressing the hope that I would renew the agreement in 1900 ; but I assured him that, strain as I might, I found it impossible to see so far ahead, my present situation having afflicted me with a shortness of vision. The upshot was that Dr. Mírzá Huseyn Khán went away, saying that he would bring me the Prince's answer on the morrow. The answer, when it came, was the reverse of satisfactory. I had spent a sleepless night on the bare blue tiles of the daïs in my miscalled bedroom, a Gladstone bag my only pillow, and had called the gods to witness that I would not spend more than a dozen such nights as a blood-offering to the sandflies and mosquitoes, let his Highness the Shadow of the King do his worst. I was not, therefore, in the

## “To-morrow, please God!”

mood to submit to his uncompromising reply to my moderate request; so, lighting a cigar in silence, I sorted the cards in my mind, and pondered over the lead that should win the odd trick.

“His Highness,” I said at last, “would appear to have perceived that the terms of the agreement give him the advantage over me in several respects——”

“On the contrary,” interrupted the doctor, smiling, “he was saying only the other day,—before your arrival, you know,—that the contract seemed framed as if on purpose to protect your interests, and not his.” There was a pause.

“I am wondering, doctor,” I broke the silence by saying, “how his Highness would define the word *reasonable*. Everything depends upon the meaning he attaches to the clause in which it occurs. The condition of my being *obedient*, according to the bond, is, whether he likes it or not, that he shall be *reasonable*. His conception of what is fair and equitable differs from mine. The question is as to who shall arbitrate between us. You tried, and failed; but I am grateful to you notwithstanding. . . . My friends told me, before I started from London, that the agreement would leave me without redress on several scores. They advised me not to sign my name to it. They thought I was a fool to accept the appointment, because so many of the duties, as laid down in the agreement, are vague and misleading, and——”

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"Then why did——?" The doctor, pausing, raised an interrogative eye to mine.

"Why did I take the risk, you mean? You may attribute my folly, doctor, either to my passion for adventure or to my trust in princes. I ran the risk then, I run the risk now, and must make shift to lie on the bed I have made for myself; the puzzle is to find the bed! Well, I must make the best of a bad bargain. There is nothing more to be said."

Whereat the doctor, happy in the belief that he had got the better of a recalcitrant Englishman, smiled a self-satisfied smile, put on his shoes, and made ready to leave, saying—

"You will settle among us, I am sure, and be happy. One of these days you will build a house here to suit your tastes. . . . No, thank you, no more tea; I have exceeded my thirst by two cups already. Good-bye."

I accompanied him so far as the compound gateway, and there I threw down my last card. It was a trump.

"Good-bye, doctor," I said, smiling. "By-the-by, the agreement was weak, I admit, but it is not so weak as it was. I took the precaution—quite unnecessarily, of course—of having it registered by Her Britannic Majesty's *charge-a'affaires* in Teheran, and bang went fifteen-and-ninepence!"

I owe it to the doctor's self-possession to confess that he did not wince. Neither did he take up the last trick: he had no trump left.

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“*Au revoir, cher ami,*” was the only reply he made.

“*A bientôt, monsieur le docteur,*” I said, shaking him by the hand. But no sooner was he gone than I sought the advice of a Dutchman, who gave it as his conviction, that I could not do better in the circumstances than turn to the Aghá-Báshí for assistance, as being the most influential go-between at the Court.

Now, the chief of the eunuchs at the palace of the Zillu’s-Sultán is, as I had occasion to mention in the last chapter, a personage of the first importance in the province, wielding an all but unlimited power over the Court officials, and holding, in the absence of his imperial master, a position in the town of Isfahán which is second to nobody’s. The measure of his influence is the court and the bribes paid to him by such placemen as would rise in the Prince’s service, and by such others as have a petition to address to his Highness. He is the ruler supreme over the ladies and women-folk of the imperial harem ; he is the governor, within those sacred precincts, of the Prince’s children, who *sélim* before him and owe him unquestioning obedience ; he is the head steward of the household, and the only individual within the walls of the palace who may make haste to grow rich without exciting in the imperial palm the itching to possess itself of the accumulated wealth. For when a man dies without issue his possessions, more often than not, become

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the property of his master. The Aghá-Báshí, it is true, has a married sister and a nephew, a prepossessing youth, to whom he is devotedly attached ; but whether they will inherit his villages and wealth, or not, lies, as I conceive, on the knees of the Zillu's-Sultán.

The humour of my pitting the Aghá-Báshí against Dr. Mírzá Huseyn Khán can be appreciated by me in retrospect only. It lay in the fact that I had no notion that I was setting by the ears two men, who were not only opponents contending for the upper hand in the Court circle, but also rivals in the pursuit of a hobby, the collecting of old Persian manuscripts. That the doctor, who is probably the most learned man in his country, and able to hold his own in any circle in England or in France, his knowledge of the languages spoken there being absolutely faultless, could be jealous of an effete individual who can neither read nor write, did not enter into my calculations as to the probable result of my calling in the Aghá-Báshí. The humour of the situation, when it dawned upon me, added a peculiar piquancy to my delight in the embroilment. It was amusing to notice how friendly grew the little doctor whenever the Aghá-Báshí and I fell out, and how suspicious he waxed at a reconciliation between his rival and myself; but all these things, infinitesimally small though they be, shall be revealed in the course of this narrative, as being of the essence of Court life in Persia, which is the apotheosis of trivialities.



H.E. AGHA-BASHI AND PRINCE ISMA'IL MIRZA IN CHILDHOOD.



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The first thing I did, then, on my return from the Dutchman, was to send a courteous message to the Aghá-Báshí by my servant Şádik, who had consented to postpone his return to Teheran and his wife, until I should be more at home within the walls of the palace enclosure. His knowledge of English was ample compensation for the daily encroachments he made upon my purse and credulity. The head eunuch's reply was, that he would bedim the brightness of my abode with his darkening presence not later than four hours after sunrise next morning. When Şádik got up at cockcrow, it was to crave my permission to go to the bazaars. On his return, he came and stood in the doorway, his hands folded and his head sunk on his breast.

“Peace be unto you,” he said in English.

I turned round, and saw a melancholy figure dressed all in sober black, a lambskin hat adding at least sixteen inches to his stature.

“And who the dickens are you?” I asked, in mild amazement.

“I was Şádik yesterday, Şáhib; I am a dam fool to-day—*ball*;” and his voice was toned to the sombre suit he wore.

“True, O Şádik! a fool and his money are soon parted.”

“Those fellows, Şáhib,” he continued, referring to the Prince's servants, “said I was a dog of an *Arméni*. By my eyes, they lied in their teeth!” And the inimitable rascal, so swearing, took off his

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tall *kuláh*, exposing a shaven crown ; then he gave himself a resounding slap on the pate. "As bare as an egg : O 'Ali," he cried, "what a good thing it is to be a true Mussulman ! The juice of the henna is cheap, but this hat and coat and these boots and trousers cost me plenty of money."

The hint fell on deaf ears.

"*Balí*," added Sádik, in a voice of abject penury long-drawn out—"ba-a-all-i-i-i!" he repeated, in a tone more poverty-stricken than ever. "Too much, too very much money—*balí*."

"And what of that?" I asked.

"What ! has the Sáhib forgotten the Aghá-Báshi's visit ?"

"Certainly not."

"It is good. And has the Sáhib an interpreter ?"

"I could hardly call you one, Sádik. But you will have to do your best."

"By my eyes !"

"Begone, you rascal !"

"Would the Sáhib have his servant bring him to shame by appearing in his presence and that of the Aghá-Báshi in his road-clothes ? It was to do honour to your Excellency that I bought these things. I said true—I am a dam fool to-day ! They cost plenty of money ; the Isfaháni are sons of burned fathers ; even this is best, that you never buy from an Isfaháni ! My wife is alone, Sáhib, and I must go to her—*balí* !"

"Go to her and be —— !" I said, meditatively.

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Soon after the Aghá-Báshi, accompanied by twenty servants, some of whom were Nubian eunuchs, came panting into the compound. I was about to go forth to meet him, when Sádik held out a restraining hand, saying—

"No, no, do not go. My Sáhib is English Sáhib; my Sáhib is too big person, too dam big person. The Aghá-Báshi must come to him—*hali!*"

He held that I should demean myself if I did more than stir in my chair; to rise bodily would be to confess my inferiority, and, as for my leaving the house, was his Sáhib a slave! I brushed past him into the courtyard, in contempt of the etiquette of the Medes and Persians, and shook the Aghá-Báshi by the hand. My frank indifference as to what I owed to my position amazed the kindly gentleman. Raising my hand to his clammy brow, he salaamed before me, and refused to sit down until I had set the example. His retainers stood in the open windows and doorways, watching my movements with open-eyed curiosity. One of them picked up a Persian pen-box in inlaid metals off the niche at his elbow, and put it in the pocket of his ample skirts. I closed my eyes to this breach of hospitality; the pen-box was the only thing of value in the room. When I had cried aloud for tea and cigarettes, Sádik, stepping to the front, apologized in my name for receiving so high and mighty a personage in what he was pleased to call "a house fit for a pig." The Aghá-Báshi rose greedily to the

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flattering bait. The promise that he would carry out my wishes in the matter of furniture and repairs set my garrulous servant babbling once more of the splendour of London drawing-rooms.

“Pa-pa-pa-pa-pa!” cried his Excellency in ingenuous rapture. “Write it all down in a letter to me, and I will crave his Imperial Highness, who has the learned Sáhib’s comfort and well-being at heart, to give himself the trouble to sign it with his seal. In the mean time, let the distinguished and high-born scholar be of good cheer ; his wishes are commands.”

When the Aghá-Báshí went away, Sádik, summoning the major, dictated to him a grandiloquent letter, bristling with knives and forks, pots and pans, chairs and carpets, tables and beds, linen and baths, and all the household gods of an English home. This letter was addressed to the Aghá-Báshí, and was sent to him at once. If I knew the story of that letter, from the moment it left my house to the time that it was lost in the maze of the intrigue which it was the means of setting afoot, I should have it in my power to astound my readers with the bewildering shifts and counter-shifts that beset my every step in the first month of my residence at the Zillu’s-Sultán’s Court. Unfortunately, however, all I know of its history is that the Aghá-Báshí, hearing that his rival had interceded for me in vain, sent it on to Doctor Mírzá Huseyn Khán, who, wriggling on the horns of the dilemma, hastened hot-foot to my abode. Was I

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aware, he asked, that a letter had been written in my name to his Imperial Highness, the senior brother of the king of Kings, a literary production of an effrontery so amazing as to come within a breath of *lèse-majesté* ?

“Indeed,” I said. “Hope to Heaven I shall not be decapitated off-hand ! A fair trial, doctor ! I claim it as the inalienable right of a free-born Englishman. *Lèse-majesté*, egad ! Are we in Prussia ?”

But Dr. Mírzá Huseyn Khán would not sink to the level of my uncalled-for levity ; had he not rather to raise a frivolous grievance to an offence that should stagger the dignity of the Lord’s anointed ?

“The letter was written in your name——”

“In English, doctor ?”

“That is not the point, monsieur. The point is that his Highness is offended—justifiably offended, as I think—by the presumptuous tone in which he has been addressed.”

Knowing, as I did, that the letter in question was the letter the major had written to the Aghá-Báshí at Şadık’s dictation, I unburdened my complete reflection in the matter of the doctor’s misapprehension of the facts, and then asked him, in artful simplicity, if he would bring the petition before the Prince. That, of course, he refused to do ; being once bitten, he was twice shy ; besides, he swore by my death that the letter was not in his possession, had never been in his hands. He had not been at home when the letter arrived, and his servant had sent it back

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whence it had come. Did I know anything about the damning scrap of paper? It was plain from his anxiety that he scented in that innocent epistle an intrigue against him by the Aghá-Báshí; and in the next week or so I never met my learned and honourable colleague but he would stop to ask me whether I had discovered its whereabouts or not.

“The last I heard of it, doctor,” I would reply every time, “was that the Aghá-Báshí sent it to you, as the official intermediary, for transmission to the Prince.”

Whether the doctor had destroyed the letter in order to triumph over his rival, or whether the Aghá-Báshí upon second reflection had withheld it, judging discretion to be the better part of valour, I have no means of deciding. We will say that it lost itself in the bewildering labyrinth of compounds and gardens.

Being thus thrown once more upon my own resources, I seized the opportunity, when the Prince entered the class-room one morning, to air my grievances on the vexed question of the furnishing and repairing of my abode, one of my pupils, Bahrám Mírzá, serving as interpreter between us. The Prince’s readiness to fall in with my demands, which were reasonable enough, Heaven knows, was a reflection on the official intermediary. I drew the obvious conclusion, deciding then and there to dispense with his services in the future. But I still pinned my faith upon the good-will of the Aghá-Báshí, whose influence over the ladies of the harem stood me in

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good stead in the steps I took to reduce their sons to discipline.

Next morning, the carpenters, masons, and painters began their work, and all went swimmingly for the first six days ; after which the men appeared no more. I waited three days in vain, and then my temper could wait no longer. Waxing as fierce as the weather (which was 108° in the shade), I harangued the young Princes in school, waving the British flag to some purpose. The boys were impressed.

“It is not for nothing,” I declared, in an outburst of ingenuous patriotism, “that we English are the masters of the world.”

And the boys, dreading lest I should send in my resignation, implored me tearfully to go to his Imperial Highness without delay.

“The workmen will never, never come back, unless his Highness gives the order,” they cried in chorus.

“He gave the order in the first instance,” I replied. “I should like to know who has had the impertinence to set it aside.”

A few minutes later, the Prince came and stood in the doorway.

“And how is your Excellency ?” he asked in his grating voice, and was about to go away again, without waiting for my reply, when Akbar Mirzá, his favourite son, taking the law into his own hands and the words out of my mouth, made a clean breast of my burdens. Whereupon the Zillu’s-

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Sultán, gathering his truculent brows in a sudden frown, glowered upon us all in lofty displeasure, and paced, slow and solemn, to the door. I cuffed Master Akbar's head for his untimely interference.

Half an hour after, much to my surprise, the Prince summoned me to his private apartments, where I found him with Dr. Mírzá Huseyn Khán and a little circle of courtiers. While the doctor and I were threshing out the vexed question of the furnishing of my abode, his Imperial Highness the Shadow of the King, looking the picture of paternal solicitude, walked up and down the room, nursing his little grandson in his arms, while he crooned a Persian lullaby. It was difficult to believe that the mention of his name is enough to intimidate the unruly all Persia over. I remained standing throughout this singular interview, wearing an expression, as I was told next day, of bull-dog tenacity. To cut a long story short, the Prince, who was courteous and friendly beyond the common, yielded gracefully at all points, the agreement between us being that my head pupil, Bahrám Mírzá, should draw out a list of my requirements, and deliver it over to the Aghá-Báshí, who would then take the matter in hand. When I had thanked the Prince, I withdrew, bowing ; his cook passed me, bearing the Zill's tiffin on a brass salver covered over with a cloth of rainbow colours ; on the threshold I turned round, and bowed again : the senior brother of the Asylum of the Universe was squatting on white satin cushions

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on the floor, dipping his fingers in a huge bowl of rice, while a couple of courtiers fanned his too solid person.

The following afternoon, when the painter was at work in the sunny wing of the house, a general in the service of the Zillu’s-Sultán called upon me, and, as he was conversant with French, I asked him to be good enough to give to the painter certain instructions as to the decoration of the drawing-room. He rendered me the service the more eagerly, because he had set his heart, as I discovered a few days afterwards, upon inducing me to engage his nephew, who was an English scholar, as an assistant-master in my little school. When the too-sanguine general left me, it was to tell Dr. Mírzá Huseyn Khán that he had put me under so signal an obligation to him that I could not find it in my heart to oppose his nephew’s ambition in the matter of the assistant-tutorship. This interlude, as it was completely unexpected, opened my eyes to the danger of accepting a favour, however trivial, from the Court officials, whose visits came to be regarded by me as the (questionable) good turn which proverbially deserves another. I felt comparatively safe only when I had learned from their lips that their relatives knew neither English nor French. As for their ambitions on their own account, I soon found it necessary to dash their darling hopes by taking them frankly into my confidence. The determination to perform my scholastic duties single-handed condemned me to live

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the life of a recluse within the walls of the palace gardens. When I decided, after many months, to engage an assistant, my choice fell upon the son of the Mullá-Báshí, the chief priest at the Court. He was a winning young Persian, tall, grave, and handsome, who had been educated at the English mission schools in Júlfá, and the appointment proved successful beyond my wildest expectations. His name is Mírzá Áhmad Khán. I was, from the beginning of our acquaintanceship to the end, "in friendly ways with him," if I might borrow one of his favourite expressions. The Prince made me a solemn promise, when Mírzá Áhmad Khán joined me in my work, to give him an adequate salary in acknowledgment of his loyal services both to himself and to me. But up to the time of my departure the imperial pledge, despite my almost monthly entreaties, remained unredeemed. I will remark, for the sake of his reputation, that the Zill has fulfilled his word since then. Of my colleague, I will say this—that he was the embodiment of that entirely rare individual, a courtier who is not a sycophant. It was well worth while to go all the way from London to Isfahán to shake him by the hand. If "travel" be, as the Arabic proverb assures us, "a portion of hell-fire," then my meeting with Mirzá Áhmad Khán, at my journey's end, must be regarded as an ascension from the nether world to the glow of the homely grate, from which we tried to learn the way of friendship, "consuming

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ourselves” (I speak of him rather than of myself) “for the sake of our neighbours.”

Meanwhile, the mural decorations of the drawing-room went on apace. The painter, whom I watched for hours, put on the ground colour, a pale yellow, not with a brush, but with a cloth of coarse texture. This done, he fell to painting a wreath of purple flowers around each niche and semi-cylinder with a fine hair-brush. His flowery scrolls were a miracle of artistic beauty. There was no trickery, no measuring, no mechanical aid whatsoever; his hand, obeying his eye with an accuracy that needed never a correcting touch, amazed me with its skill. His sense of colour, however, was not so unerring. His original scheme clashed almost aloud, so that I compelled him, sorely against his judgment, to substitute less strident hues, and even went so far as to pluck a couple of flowers out of the garden in order to bring him to a better understanding with his pigments. The plasterer, also, who moulded the chimney-piece in clay, deserves a word of praise. The only instrument he used, save his mobile fingers, was a short wooden knife, his work in relief being particularly effective. I pass over the difficulty I had with the carpenter, whose first notion of a bed was a garden-seat; his second, a wooden box in the shape of a coffin; and his third, a combination of the two, the coffinlike structure being nailed atop. His incomparable creations served the purpose of teaching me certain Persian expressions, which stood me in good

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stead when I came to deal with the man who brought me huge glass bowls, the shape and size of flower-pots on stems, as a substitute for champagne-glasses. The carpets thrust upon me beggar description. The weaving was loose, the scheme of colour crude and gaudy, the design hideous beyond endurance. Still, at last, I contrived, despite the bullet-headed stupidity of the carpenter, to lend to my abode an appearance of homely comfort. What there was of discomfort in my surroundings was made even by the consolation I derived from the fact that it was the Prince, and not his humble servant, who was called upon to pay the pipers, whose name was legion. For the cost of furnishing the house was swelled out of all proportion to the intrinsic value of the effects by the commission, perquisites, and other pickings and stealings which fell to the share of the Aghá-Báshí, who drew up the bill, and to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who cashed it—to say nothing of the *mirzâ* who penned the words, and the *mirzâ* who read them aloud in the imperial ear. And when his Highness signed the account of wholly immoral and partly imaginary damages with his imperial seal, I had the gratifying feeling that British influence in Central Persia was not dead yet. Nor is it. I had occasion, as you shall hear, again and again to test the reality of our influence at Isfahán; I fought several bloodless battles with the officials; I was sometimes compelled to call the Prince's justice in question (more than once in the matter of my colleague's salary);

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and, in all my encounters with the Powers that be, I attribute my decidedly cheap successes, not to any overpowering characteristics in myself, but rather to the fact that, from the Prince on his white satin cushions to the drunken executioner in his blood-red cloak, every living soul about the Court of the Zillu’s-Sultán saw, in my resistance to anything savouring of injustice or oppression, the strength of the British Empire. The fifteen-and-ninepence had been well invested.

In dealing with Court officials in Persia, the blunder is to cross rapiers with them in what is called diplomacy. Persian diplomatists are adepts in the perplexing arts and artifices which go to the making of the licensed liar. In subtle subterfuge and wily shifts they cannot be matched. Hence to oppose their Oriental parry and thrust with any weapon save the pistol-shot of truth, delivered point-blank at close quarters, is to lay bare your breast to the keen edge of the rapier they wield with so deft a hand. The important thing is to have a policy, an aim, an end ; not a policy dimly described as of something impossible of attainment, but a policy within the reach of the allied forces of justice, truth, and strength. I would say to the British diplomatists in Persia, be just, be frank, be truthful (which goes without saying), be strong. Great store should be laid by frankness. I strained the quality with success to the point of revealing my opponents to themselves. The virtue need not go farther, but it should go as far as that.

## CHAPTER III

### A HOME WITHOUT A WIFE

WHEN I was in Persia the most frequent question that came to my hand by post was : "What are you having to eat at your end of the world?" and I was rated soundly by my friends because of my remissness in not making epistolary capital out of my culinary experiences. I excused myself then by pleading the impossibility of paying a literary tribute to my food, since I had fallen into the Persian habit of taking a nap after tiffen, and of going to bed as soon as I had discussed my supper ; "and surely," I added, "you would not expect me to wax eloquent on an aftertaste?" But the excuse was flung indignantly back to me.

The truth is, when we Firangis are grown accustomed to the Persian life, we do not think it worth the effort to give shape and colour to our impressions by putting pen to paper. It is more comfortable to rejoice inwardly that our balance, amid the topsy-turveydom of our surroundings, has been restored by the kindly hand of custom ; we

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prefer to chew the cud of meditation as the Persians do, and we will until the end of our stay be warned to evade the enthusiasm that would spur us into correspondence ; for when a Firangi catches the Oriental fever, his gusto for writing is speedily swallowed by “a yawning figure of interrogation leaping over its own full stop.”

Now the daily round, so long as I was content to abide within the Court circle, kept pace with the sun. I would rise at six, take a header into the tank, drink a cup of tea without milk, and be ready at seven to saunter to school in the *Divan-Khdnē*, preceded by my two soldiers bearing the books and writing materials. These would be laid aside at midday, when the Persians take to themselves the *nahdr*, the first substantial meal of the day. Mine, during the six weeks in which I was the Zillu’s-Sultán’s guest, was brought over to me from his cooking-house, on an immense tray of brass covered over with a cloth of brilliant design in purple and gold. The average number of courses (all served at once) was fifteen. Among these there were always a dozen poached eggs on a china dish ; a basin of *ab-gusht*, or mutton broth under a layer of yellow oil ; a platter containing a *pildw* of boiled rice flavoured with orange juice or mixed with currants ; a more substantial *pildw* mixed with stewed meat ; and a lamb *kebab* on a wooden skewer, folded in a sheet of “pebble-bread” to keep it warm. The bread derives its name from the sloping back of pebbles (within the oven) on

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which are set the flat cakes of dough. The *entrées* consisted of one rich *khoresh* (curry) of flesh and another of fowl, to be eaten with the *chilaw* or plain boiled rice, of which there were two white pyramids on plates.

For dessert I had peaches as big as cocoa-nuts, grapes as big as English plums, several kinds of melon, for the growth of which Isfahán is famous, and delectable dates, from the Persian Gulf, stowed away in the rind of a melon. A bowl of delicious sherbet, composed of pomegranate juice split with iced sugar and water, and served with a beautifully carved pear-wood spoon from Abádé, and an uncorked bottle of Shiráz wine, with a purple aster stuck in the neck by way of a stopper, were the beverages laid before me. Last of all, was a basin of *mdst-khiyár*, curds and cucumbers, a favourite dish with the Persians, that should be eaten at the end of the repast, and digested in the arms of Morpheus ; for the slight thirst it excites, as the uninitiated have learned from internal evidence, should not be made an excuse for the glass. The thirst will pass away in sleep, provided the sherbet and the wine be left alone : to quaff of the fragrant cups, would be to set the curds and cucumbers a-squabbling and a-swelling to the visible discomfort of the inner man.

The Zillu's-Sultán's servant, having deposited the tray on the floor, would say to me, “Núsh-i-ján-bád” (“May it be sweet to your soul !”), then he would withdraw, leaving my road-servant Sádik to lay the cloth. In the place of a table there was the floor ;



A - IKA / SPELLING ICED WATER.



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the five fingers of my right hand did duty for knives and forks ; and as for the plates, behold a plentiful supply of "pebble-bread" in thin sheets one on top of the other. First Şádik would spread over the carpet a square of oil-cloth, atop of which he would lay a gaudy strip of chintz, setting each dish where it belonged. The place of honour at the head of the table-cloth, facing the door, where the master of the house sits, is occupied by the two dishes of *pıldaw* ; opposite to them, at the other end, rise the two pyramids of white *childaw* ; the bowl of sherbet with the spoon floating in it stands in the middle ; and the ragouts and fruits are placed at the extreme corners, facing one another diagonally. In the family circle, the father, having rolled up his sleeves and squatted himself on his knees and heels, helps himself first, then he passes the spoon (the dish remaining stationary) to his wife at his right hand, and she serves herself and her children in the order of seniority. The mode of consuming the rice, from time immemorial, is to get as much of it as possible in the fork of the forefinger and thumb pressed closely together, cramming it into the mouth by means of the latter ; and the best way of eating the spicy ragout is to roll it up, bit by bit, in a morsel of pebble-bread, which, being as it is of the consistency of pancake, neither crumbles nor breaks in the process. The cooking of the rice is beyond all praise ; the best Parisian *chef* could not prepare it half so well ; the *childaw*, in particular, is a triumph :

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every single grain of it is separate, so dry is it, on the outside ; but inside it is full of juice. The *pilâw* has a singularly sobering effect upon the diners, and can scarcely be said to be conducive to conversation—indeed, the Persians must do all their talking immediately before meals.

“The yellow weeping of the Shiráz vine” has the smack of old sherry, and, at its prime, is exceedingly dry, fruity, and inspiring. As everybody keeps silent, the meal, notwithstanding the enormous consumption of food, is all over within twenty minutes, and ends with the washing of hands by pouring water over them from a brass ewer into a brass bowl ; after which mouths are rinsed, sleeves rolled down, then a pipe of tobacco is smoked, and slumber won, in summer-time, at least, without much wooing of the drowsy god.

I had no scruples about following the customs of the country in these particulars, and I persevered in the endeavour to gain proficiency in the Persian method of dining, until I had wrung from the powers that be the necessities of an English dinner-table. The desire to continue in the habit died with the necessity of doing so ! After the post-prandial drowsiness had yielded to a siesta and a cold tub, I would dress myself in clean linen and white flannels, and while away the hours between three o’clock and sundown, first by drilling the young princes, and next by entertaining my guests, or by paying visits to my friends. The meal that brings

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the day to a close is called *shām*: it is served about two hours after sunset, and consists of the same viands as the *nahār* and in almost equal abundance. I owe it to my reputation to assure the reader that the food provided for me was not the measure of my appetite, but that of the Prince's hospitality, on which a squad of soldiers might have fared not wisely but too well.

In the matter of visiting, the initial point is to have an assurance by letter that your Persian friend will be at home and willing to receive you at the hour appointed by you. It would be loss of time to call on the offchance of finding him within doors; if he were, he would not bid you enter after so gross a breach of punctilio. Second in importance to this alone is the custom of going on horseback, accompanied by as many mounted servants as you can muster; the number of your retinue will be accepted, not only as an indication of your rank, but also as a compliment to your host's. Our Consuls in Persia are apt to lose sight of the objective consideration in their contempt for the purely personal show. This is a misapprehension of the question at issue, that is never committed by the representatives of the Czar. When Prince Dabija went out visiting, he challenged comparison with the Zillu's-Sultán in the accessories of power, the result being that his name was never mentioned by the gentlemen about the Court save in a voice of unfeigned admiration, and

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even awe. The effect upon the Zillu's-Sultán himself was scarcely less marked. As, in the days of Sháh 'Abbás the Great, the Persian soldiers had been paid in proportion to the length of their moustaches, so, in the year of Grace 1898, the scale of Russian influence, on the withdrawal of Mr. Preece's countervailing weight to Teheran, rose with the pomp and splendour of Prince Dabija's retinue. The dash he cut drove, like rain, to the root of the Zill's esteem, and it took our absent Consul not a little by surprise to hear that his Russian rival had been made a present of four magnificent Arab stallions by the Prince-Governor of Isfahán. I had made it a rule to call upon my friends in a carriage-and-four with postilions and outriders, and I kept up the practice until my love of riding overcame the wisdom "of putting on side."

For the rest, the cardinal points of etiquette are as follows : Men holding official positions await the visits of their inferiors, returning the compliment in the order of precedence. The guests are ushered into the chief room fronting the court, where tea, coffee, sweetmeats, and the inevitable *kalyán* are served. Everybody stands up when the host, bowing his head slightly to his visitors, who return the greeting with a low salaam, passes to his accustomed place facing the door. If the master of the house be in the room already, the new-comer should remain standing, grave and silent, his head inclined forward, and his hands folded at the waist, until such time

## A Home without a Wife

as he shall be invited to sit down. A visit from a superior is the occasion of no end of ceremony and expense, which has been adequately described in that biting satire, "Hajji Baba of Ispahan." It will be enough to say here that the host must set out to meet him, saying, "My dwelling is lightened by the brightness of your face," or, "You purify my abode with the sunny radiance of your presence," or some such grandiloquent expression. In the case of a visitor of equal rank it is considered courteous in the host to welcome him by half rising, while all that politeness dictates to him in the reception of an inferior is that he should stir *sur son séant* as if he were on the point of so far forgetting his superiority as to stand up. Men of equal rank are permitted to cross their legs when hobnobbing ; whereas, in the company of a man of importance, they must kneel on the floor and squat on their heels, the knees being pressed together, and the feet concealed in the folds of the coat.

His Highness Jalálu'd-Dawla, the famous son of the Zillu's-Sultán, took me by surprise when he paid me a visit, and I believe now that he broke the customary rule for no other purpose than to spare me the fuss and expense of entertaining him in a manner befitting his rank—an act of condescension that won my deepest gratitude, for he came at a time when I was ill-prepared to do him the customary honour. Of his visit I shall have more to say in the proper place.

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The conversation at these social gatherings is, within the limits of a restricted experience, exceptionally brilliant, vigorous, and alert. It ranges from a cesspool of obscenities, through the cleansing atmosphere of literary and anecdotal humour, to the metaphysician's cloudy realm. As the earnest pursuit of truth on the wing, where the reach must ever exceed the grasp, is an evidence of the irrepressible vitality of the race, so the stirring of the depths of the unmentionably filthy would seem to be a sign of corruption and decay.

The most characteristic, and certainly the most fruitful expression of the national tendency to speculative thought, is the faith of the Báb, who laid it down as an axiom that the Creator's revelation of Himself to His creatures through the teaching of His prophets has been, is, and will ever be, continuous and progressive. The equality of the mediums is insisted on, and so also is the advancement of the revelations, that keep pace with the intellectual development of the world. I would call this Bábí'ism the turning of the more meditative eye of the race upon the new light of dawn, heralding an era of clearer principles and more active patriotism. It is, as it were, a feather plucked from the wing of truth by the Aryan hawk. The Semitic teaching of Muḥammad was embraced by the Persians at the edge of the sword, and if they still remain outwardly faithful to its dogma, it is only because they still have the fear of death before their eyes. To have no king save

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Cæsar is to court the fate of the Jews. If the Cæsar who rules in Persia, in his reforming zeal, would throw in his lot with the Bábís, his name of Victorious of the Faith would come to have a more popular significance. For the belief of far more than half of the population of Persia is the belief of the Bábís, whose souls, incorruptible as they have been under torture and persecution, should prove not less staunch in the more trying hour of victory.

However, passionate as is their love of metaphysical speculation, it is in the middle distance of their conversational range that the Persians are unrivalled within the necessarily narrow sphere of their surroundings and education. Their artistic temperament (I am speaking of the Aryan Persians, remember, and not of their Turkish oppressors, represented by the Kájár dynasty) reveals itself in their passion for poetry, in the spontaneous gift of capping one extemporary couplet by another even more to the point, and in the histrionic inclination to character-acting and mimicry. In wit and in humour, as well as in vigour and originality of intellect, they stand in the forefront of Eastern peoples.

The presence of a Firangi calls forth that element of childishness in their minds which is, after all, nothing more nor less than the result of the limitations of their environment. For instance, when the Ilkhání of Kuchán was told by Curzon that eight days were required to go from London to

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America, he was immediately asked if the distance was 80 *farsakhs*, i.e. 320 miles, reckoning from the distance of a day's land march in Persia. Fath-'Alí Sháh, according to Morier, had been equally curious about America, and asked Sir Harford Jones, "What sort of a place is it? How do you get to it? Is it underground?" In like manner, a Persian envoy to London, half a century later, being told that the steamer which was carrying him had engines of 500-horse power, exclaimed delightedly, "Oh, show me the stables."

This reply may be capped by a story of the Zillu's-Sultán. On the afternoon that the painters left my house, having finished their work at last, Bahrám Mírzá and I were talking together in the garden of the Díván-Kháné, when his father joined us, and said, "What are you talking about?" Bahrám Mírzá told him that I had been describing an English battle-ship. Whereupon the Zill, with an air of testing his son's progress in his Firangi studies, put a question as to the number of the fish in the sea, and met with the reply—

"As many as there are grains of sand on the sea-shore."

"Nothing of the sort," rapped out the Zill. "There are none left, the wings of the English warships, which are set in motion by engines more powerful than 30,000 horses put together, having destroyed them all. . . . Ask the Sáhib if I speak not the truth."

## A Home without a Wife

I told Bahrám Mírzá to inform his Highness that the fact was one of such immense importance as to be uncommonly like a whale. My gravity of demeanour stood the test of Bahrám's perplexed scrutiny. When he translated my reply, the Zill, laying hold of his ear, turned to me and said—

“I fear the boy is growing idle. If he neglects his opportunities you must give him ‘the sticks to eat.’” The next instant he turned away.

Bahrám watched his father strutting through the curtained doorway into the harem ; then a twinkle came into his eyes.

“*Que voulez-vous !*” said he. “When I play at chess with his Highness, I am always obliged to let him win. The sons of a big prince are always in the wrong.”

“Like absent friends,” said I.

“Worse. They are not present, whereas we are. But explain your remark about the whale, sair.”

“I will explain it,” I replied, “when you can read Shakespeare.”

“Then we will begin to read Shakespeare to-morrow—yes, sair ? Which play shall we choose first ?”

“Oh, *The Tempest*, of course.”

“The sea again !” cried Bahrám ; “yes, sair ?”

“Yes, there is a good deal about the sea in it. There are sailors, and a storm, and a shipwreck—and even a fish or two ! The play happened before England ruled the waves—you understand ?”

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“Wah ! wah ! wah !” cried Bahrám. “If I were a man-eater, I could eat you without salt ! . . . But your house is now ready, I hope, sair.”

“Yes, thank the Powers that be. The masons left a week ago, and the painters finished their work to-day. And that reminds me, my boy, that I have an appointment at my house in half an hour’s time, so good-bye for the present.”

“And what is the appointment ?”

“I am going to engage a cook and a bearer. Anything else ?”

“Yes, sair, . . . what is a bearer ?”

“A bearer, O boy of the inquiring and inquisitive mind, is a body-servant.”

“But is not Şádik your body-servant ?”

“Şádik will set out to Teheran to-morrow, and I will forestall the next question by telling you that he cannot live without his wife any longer.”

“Are there no women in Isfahán that he goes to my uncle’s city ?”

“Not for him. Şádik is a one-wife husband. Good-bye.”

“But shall I not come and translate for you ? Please, sair, say ‘Yes.’”

“No ; Şádik is my interpreter,” said I, walking away.

There were twenty-six servants awaiting my arrival in the compound, and Şádik, who was there to help me to select the two best, came to my assistance at once, saying—

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“Here are sixteen cooks, Şáhib, and ten bearers, and twenty-four out of the twenty-six are sons of burned fathers and children of mothers of evil reputations. If your slave is to be happy on the road, let him beg the Dispenser of Comfort to send them all away, except the two that his slave has chosen. The heart of his slave would be narrow, and his nose would grow thin, to think of the Master of his Soul being served by any two among the harem-begotten twenty-four. They will not go away——”

“Let me have a look at the cook first,” I said, interrupting him in the flux of speech.

Şádik singled out a smug-faced rascal, whose bearing was bland and servile.

“I don’t like the cut of his countenance, Şádik. He looks like an Armenian.”

“An Arméni!” expostulated Şádik. “The Well of Wisdom is being misled by the cook’s face ; but his name is Hái-jí Seyyid Muhammad ’Alí ! ”

“Hái-jí—Seyyid—Muhammad ’Alí—is it ? ” I repeated. “If he is a pilgrim and a descendant of the Prophet, why, in the name of all that’s holy, does he wish to cook the food of an unclean Firangí like myself ? ”

Şádik’s reply was : “Is not the Teacher of Princes in the service of the Zillu’s-Sultán, and is not the Zillu’s-Sultán the ruler over all the Háijs and Seyyids in his provinces ? Hái-jí Seyyid Muhammad ’Alí is a good man. I know him well. He is dam good cook—*bâli*.”

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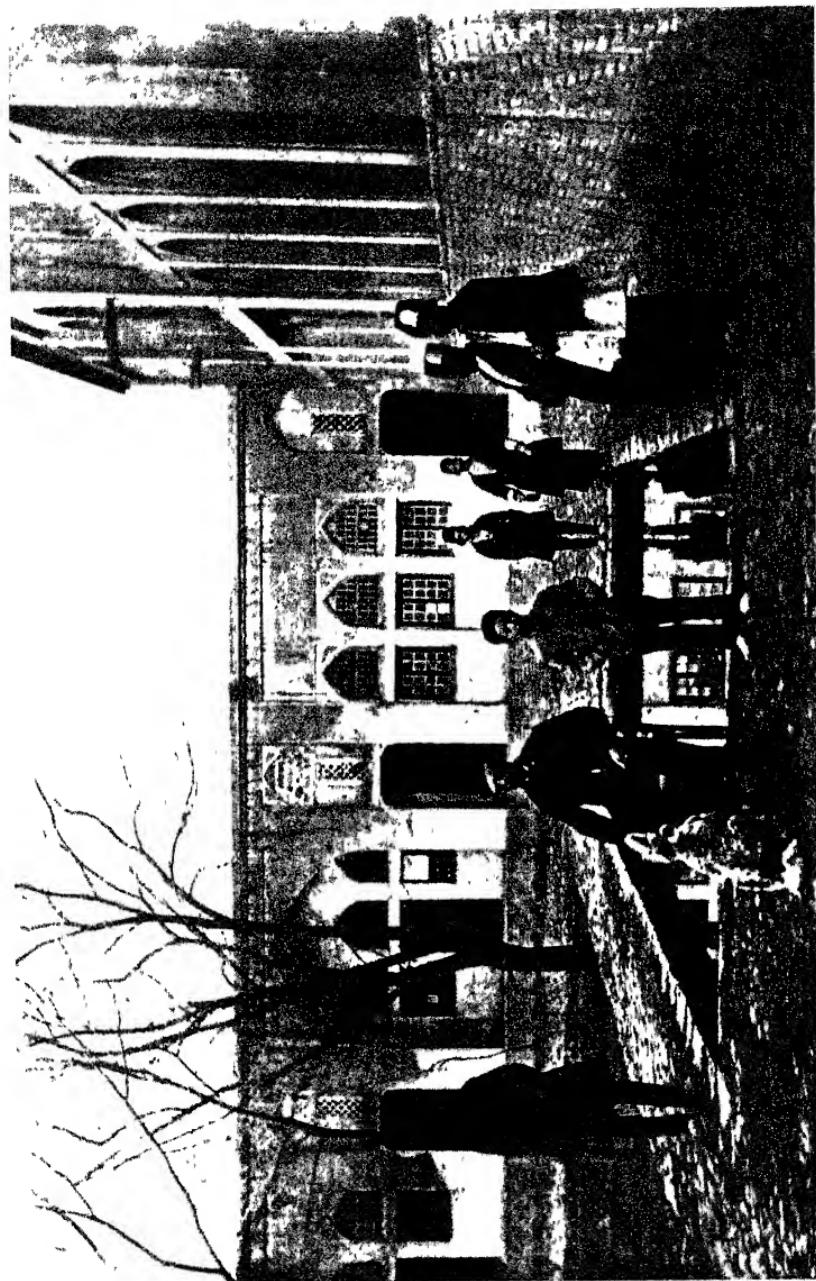
"All right. I will take your word for it. Tell him I will give him *5 túmáns* a month so long as he suits me, provided he can cook Firangí fashion."

"Sáhib," said Sádik, "the Queen of Landan would praise his plates. He is very dam too good Firangí cooking."

"Dismiss the other fifteen cooks, then, and tell 'Alí—I shall call him by the name of the Friend of God for brevity's sake—to have dinner ready by sunset."

That being interpreted, the ten bearers were ordered to stand in a line for inspection by the Substance of Generosity, for I had expressed the determination to choose the body-servant myself. At the word of command, nine of them gathered round me, snapping at one another, tooth and nail and tongue, like the Niamitis and Hyderis on the *rúz-i-katl* (day of cutting) in the month of Muharram. Then, splitting into two contending forces, they advanced within arm's length of one another, under the cover of a volley of defiant abuse, only to beat a sudden retreat, growling like so many pariah dogs from rival parishes. But the tenth, dressed in a flowing *'abd* and a white turban, stood before me in an attitude of proud humility, that a captive king might envy. He was six-feet-two in his socks, and had a trim black moustache, otherwise his face, that reminded me of Sir Henry Irving's as Hamlet, was smooth-shaven.

"That's my man," said I. "Sádik, clear the compound of those yapping pariah dogs."



THE INDO-EUROPEAN TELEGRAPH HOUSE AND STAFF AT SOH, 7,560 FEET ABOVE THE SEA-LEVEL.



## A Home without a Wife

“Praise God!” cried Şádik. “The Dispenser of Presents has an eye that is both man-recognizing and dog-recognizing under every disguise. The body-servant your Excellency has chosen is he whom I myself had chosen. His name is Hájí Ismá’il, and he is an Arab from the holy city of Makkah.”

Next morning Şádik set out for Teheran at sunrise, and two hours after I sent a message to the Zillu’s-Sultán by my pupils’ chief aide-de-camp, thanking him warmly for his hospitality, and telling him that I should not require my meals to be sent over to me from his cooking-house any longer. Nothing could have been clearer than the communication from myself to the Prince, but, notwithstanding its simplicity, the intermediary managed to misinterpret it shamefully. When the rascal returned, it was to inform me through Bahrám Mírzá that his Highness could not “provide food for me, no such stipulation being in the agreement.” My amazement was speedily swallowed in one pervading flame of indignation, and I drove both the general and Bahrám Mírzá before me into the Prince’s audience-chamber. The Prince was not there, so down we went into the garden, where we found him inspecting a parade of thoroughbreds, ridden bare-backed by grooms in long blue smocks. “Now,” said I, bowing to the Prince, and turning to Bahrám Mírzá, “order that soldierless general to deliver to his Highness the message I gave him through you.” After much wagging of tongues, Bahrám Mírzá said

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that his Highness thanked me for the expressions of gratitude I had conveyed to him, and was extremely sorry that so ridiculous a blunder should have been made.

“Have the goodness to make it clear to his Highness,” said I, “that I could not allow the general’s misapprehension to give the lie to the first principles of English courtesy, since it is my duty to inculcate those principles in his sons. I cannot afford that it should be said of me, as it was said of my predecessor, that I went bleating round about a Persian palace for food. Let the general look to it that he be of use to me in the school-room, or, by Heaven, I will test his mettle on his own field of action !”

The Zillu’s-Sultán stood up, strained an arm to my shoulder, and said—

“I am more than pleased with you, Sáhib. You have taught the general a lesson he will not forget. It is well that you came (*Khosh amadid*).”

I thought so too, but in a less formal connection, and went back to my work, congratulating myself upon having nipped a mean intrigue in the bud ; on the other hand, I am bound to admit that the general was not long in regaining my esteem, so quick was he to retrieve his first error of judgment by all manner of useful service. Had my domestic experiences, after Sádik’s departure, been on the same level of progress, I should have been a happy man. But there was no such luck about the house,

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for Dame Nature, in fashioning the Isfaháni, whose reputation for every sort of petty sin is proverbial, would seem to have spared herself no labour to mould a scamp that should be incomparably superior in rascality to any other specimen of the kind save only the mealy-mouthed Armenian. The Cockney pickpocket is not lacking in merits qualifying him for competition. The Parisian light-fingered gentleman has mastered the rudiments of his craft. The heathen Chinee, in the service of a Christian missionary, is more or less of an adept in concealing his guile. But all those competitors are cloaked in blameless innocence in comparison with the merest tyro among the fraternity in Isfahán. Trust Morier: he knew what he was about when he cast the nativity of his hero, "Hajji Baba," in that far-famed city of deceit.

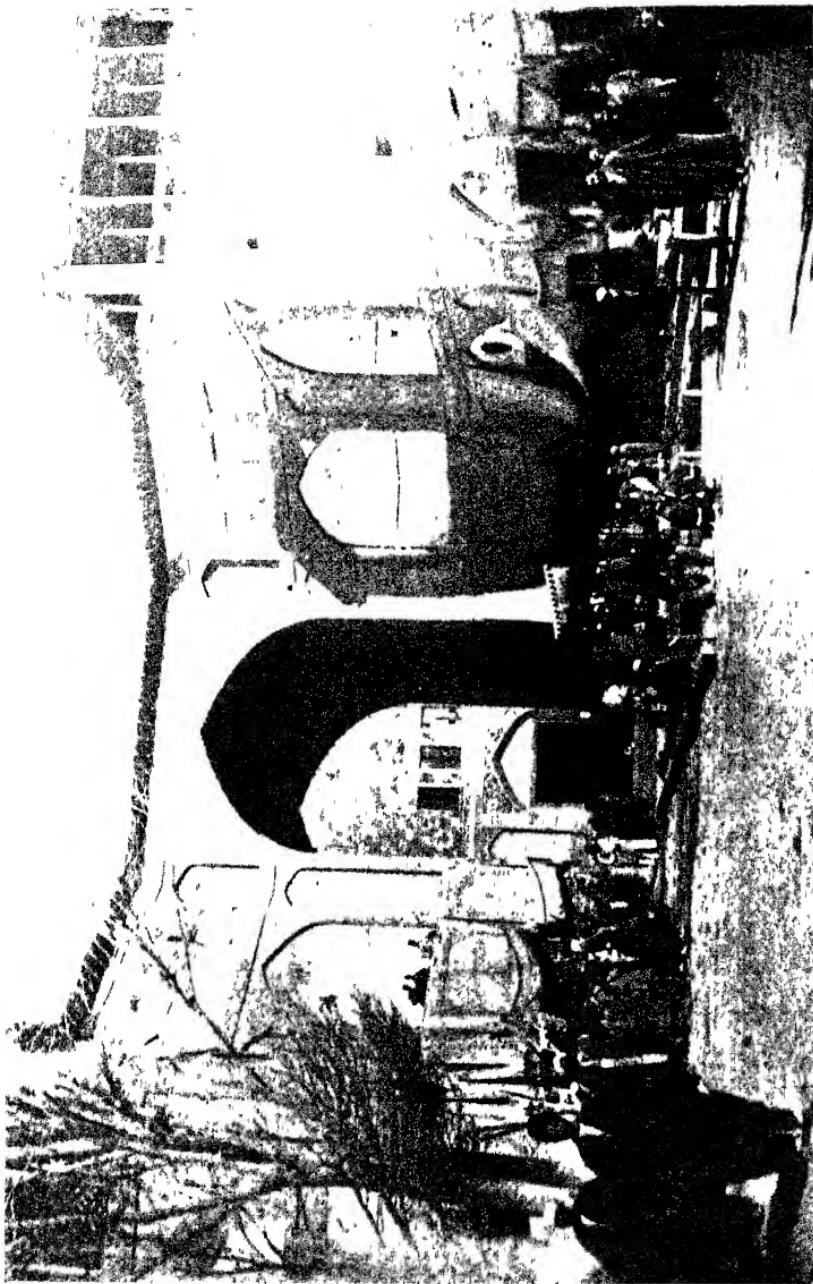
There the Palace of Forty Pillars might be more appropriately called the Palace of Forty Thieves, were it not that the numeral would cause jealousy among the servants as not being sufficiently inclusive. Now, my cook, Háji Seyyid Muhammád 'Alí, was not a past-master, still he was an Isfaháni, and did his best to be true to his birthplace. The first thing I found out about him was that he could not cook; the second, that he was not a Seyyid, never having worn a blue turban before; the third, that he had no right to the title of Háji, since he had never set foot outside his native city; the fourth, that piety and lying, sanctity and theft, were, as

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practised by him, so closely blended as to be interchangeable.

Five times a day he would say his prayers, going through the six postures with a solemnity that almost persuaded me to be a Mussulman. First he would stand erect, his hands down by his sides ; then raising his hands to both cheeks, the fingers extended, he would declare the greatness of God ; then he would incline his body from the waist, and place his hands on his knees ; next he would stand up again, his head inclined forward and his hands on either side of his face ; next he would kneel *dú zánu* on his prayer-rug and extend his hands downward ; after which he would prostrate himself bodily, until his forehead touched the ground. As these prayerful exercises lent a certain suppleness to his limbs, so his devious excursions from the truth, by which they were invariably followed, informed his mind with a subtlety it would be hard to match. When he was not asleep coiled up in a felt rug, he would cudgel his brain to devise some scheme of plunder whereby he might put money in his purse, and it cannot be denied that his most inspired plans occurred to him when he was saying his prayers—a proof of the efficacy of his appeals, that cost me 75 *túmdás* in the first fortnight of his service.

On the first occasion that his prayer was answered, Hái Seyyid Muḥammad Alí, having prostrated himself at sunset, brought in the big china



THE GATEWAY OF THE COPPER BAZAAR AT ISFAHAN



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lamp I had bought the day before, adroitly tripped himself up on the door-sill, and fell headlong into the room with a shower of glass about his ears. The next morning he brought me a lamp of inferior quality for which I had to pay 20 *tūmdāns*. The success of his first achievement fired him with a more ambitious project. Having collected all the cooking utensils he could lay his hands on in the kitchen, he pitched them down the well (every Persian house has a well, the water being drawn to the surface by means of a windlass and bucket) ; then he came to tell me that Şádik had stolen them. As an additional safeguard, he had taken the precaution to buy a fresh set of pots and pans, lest I should dismiss him in the belief that he was the culprit, before he had time to indemnify himself for the strain upon his ingenuity. Had he not laid the blame upon Şádik, whom I knew to have been honest within the limits of my credulity, Hájí Seyyid Muḥammad 'Alí might have earned the right to fleece me to his heart's content as a licensed master of his craft. As it was, I refused to buy the pots and pans from him, on substantiating my suspicions that he had been the culprit, and transferred the commission to my body-servant, Hájí Isma'il, who had caught him in the act of throwing the others away. Notwithstanding this summary conviction, 'Alí would persist in the daily display of his resources, until at last I lost patience, and dismissed him. Fortunately for me, the Wind of Fate, as

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personified by Hájí Isma'il, was not so unkind and so easterly in its effect upon my callow condition of mind as it had been in the conduct of the smug-faced cook. It made a distinctly successful endeavour to temper its breath to the shorn lamb. I cannot be too grateful to "Hájí Seyyid" Muḥammad 'Alí for the insight he afforded me into Isfahání character.

As for Hájí Isma'il, all things considered, it must be counted to him for righteousness that he was not an Isfahání ; that is to say, he was neither a fanatical rogue nor a sanctimonious thief as by environment brought low. If he set a pretty high price upon the services he rendered me, he made it a point of honour to scrutinize the accounts of the other servants with a zealous regard to my financial stability. Under his watchful eye the new cook's pickings and stealings were reduced to the barest pittance, and so were those of the groom. Furthermore, in his anxiety to make himself indispensable to my comfort, he set about learning my language by writing down, in a little book he had bought for the purpose, the English word for every single thing the house contained. In this manner, and by going farther afield in his search for common nouns, he contrived to commit to memory some three thousand words in such an incredibly short space of time that I was obliged to take lessons in Persian in order to keep abreast of him.

The *mirzā* I engaged, a turbaned gentleman of a meek and ingenuous cast of countenance, was called

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Mírzá Saleh. One day we were looking through a book of European photographs of mine, among which were many reproductions of famous pictures. When we came to that of the Crucifixion, Mírzá Saleh, wiping a sympathetic eye, asked me not to turn over the leaf (a very touching tribute to my Faith), adding in his measured, but broken English, "Enough is—sorry I am—sád I am—véry!" Nothing I could say in praise of the remaining pictures would induce him to have a look at them. He would only shake his head, still murmuring the same refrain, "Enough is—sorry I am—sád I am—véry!" However, the next time he came, he begged me to show him the album again; and, when I handed it to him, he began at the end, turning over the pages from left to right, until the scene on Calvary appeared once more. Then, having thus satisfied his curiosity without offence to his scruples, he closed the book, raised a pair of wet eyes to mine, and said, "Jews naughty are—sorry I am—sád I am—véry!" I put him down as a Bábí at once—not without reason, as the sequel will show; but never a word was said of the forbidden faith.

Our conversations were as blunt as our dictionaries could make them. He would squat on the carpet, thumbing his Persian-English dictionary, while I would string the reply together by the help of the companion volume. Our favourite topic was the management of a house without a housewife. It had struck me, after my experience with "Hájí

## Persian Children of the Royal Family

Seyyid" Muḥammad 'Alí, that I might do a more foolish thing than call in the assistance of a special servant who should run the show—if I might be allowed to use an expressive vulgarism,—and the noble Arab seemed to me as trustworthy a man as I should be likely to find within the walls of the notorious city of Isfahán. I therefore proposed to pay him a sum of 55 *túmáns* (£11) a month for the purpose, cautiously consulting Mírzá Saleh beforehand as to Hájí Isma'il's qualifications for the post. My first question was terribly down-right: it positively scared the little Mírzá to such a pitch of bewilderment that his fingers went trembling right through the dictionary in search of a reply at once adequate and not too incriminating.

Said I, fingering the dictionary, "Is Hájí Isma'il honest?"

Now, no self-respecting Persian would dream of answering a question by a bold affirmative or by a blunt negative. A margin is always reserved for the writing of the finger of the unexpected. So now I had to repeat the question with an emphasis that demanded either "Yes" or "No" for an answer.

Mírzá Saleh, busy with the pages of his volume, replied:—

"Little—take care—Hájí Isma'il's God—money is!"

I replied (same "business"), "That is no answer. I want one word. Is he honest?"

Mírzá Saleh closed his eyes in meditation, opened



MIRZA SALFH TEACHING HIS ARMENIAN PUPILS TO WRITE PERSIAN



## A Home without a Wife

them and shook his head, closed them again, and then sat buried in thought, his fingers on his eyelids. By-and-by, he looked up, baffled.

"One word, Sáhib?" said he, as who should say, "The task is impossible!"

"Certainly, Mírzá Saleh," I insisted.

He shut his eyes for the third time, as though he would keep the truth from popping out at unawares. When he opened them at last, it was to search for the English of the word he had chosen. His face wore an expansive smile when he had found it.

"Sáhib," he cried triumphantly, "dé-fi-ci-ent."

"'Deficient' is good, Mírzá Saleh."

"It is not bád," he replied in a voice of self-congratulation impossible to describe.

"I will engage—another—servant, then," I said, laboriously.

"It behtar would be, Sáhib," was his answer.

The lesson over, Mírzá Saleh went away in confidential talk with my Armenian washerman, who called himself by the name of Lucas Matthews. On the morrow, the little Mírzá informed me that the Armenian would undertake to supply all my needs for a sum of 45 *túmáns* a month, and he pointed out the obvious advantages in my having a steward who was a good English scholar. The subsequent interview with Matthews ended in my engaging him. The man interested me in many ways. He had been educated in India, was a keen

## Persian Children of the Royal Family

politician, a fluent and grandiloquent conversationalist, and had performed before the late Sháh in the capacity of a conjurer. On this account I gave him the title of Sorcerer to the King.

The next thing to do was to break the news to the noble Arab, for whose character, notwithstanding the stigma cast upon his honesty, I had conceived a warm regard ; in fact, the determining factor in my resolution to supersede him had been not so much his disqualifications for the post as the Sorcerer's more evident qualifications for it. To have retained his services in a less responsible situation, however, would have been an insult as bringing him under the control of an Armenian : so I had no choice but to give him his *congé*. He took his dismissal like a gentleman, and, having kissed my hand and raised it to his forehead, he returned to the desert, a wanderer on the face of the earth. The next person to leave was Mírzá Saleh, and this was how it came about. One afternoon he came to me, and said——

“Sáhib, Háiji Seyyid Hasan is spreading it abroad that the young princes—may their august father prosper!—are unclean because they are being taught by you ; and, furthermore, that I am doubly unclean in that I am giving Persian lessons to a Sáhib who is rendering the princes unfit to associate with the true Believers. The Sáhib, he cannot injure ; but me . . . well, he will not allow me to buy food in the bazaars.”



THE LORCHÁN BRIDGE ON THE ROAD TO KATVÍN



## A Home without a Wife

“And who is this man Hájí Seyyid Hasan?” I asked.

“He is a rich merchant who hates the Jews, and persecutes them. He is the cause of their disability to trade in the city.”

“I am glad he is rich, Mírzá Saleh, for his wealth will enable the Prince to administer the corrective discipline of a fine. I will speak to him on his return from Ghameshláw.”

But when I laid the case before the Prince, he advised me to turn a deaf ear to such petitions, if I had the slightest regard for my own peace of mind.

“The longer you are in my service,” said the Zill, “the more frequent these appeals will be, so the best thing you can do is to refuse to listen to them.”

“Sir,” I replied, “that has been my policy from the first in dealing with petitions outside my sphere of influence. But this is a case that reflects upon the young princes who are my pupils.”

“My sons are beyond the reach of this merchant, Sáhib. Let him talk! He can do nothing.”

“On the contrary, your Highness,” I replied; “he would appear to have the power to set your confidence in me at defiance.”

“How so!” cried the Zillu’s-Sultán.

“Sir,” I replied, “you are graciously pleased to put your trust in me, and yet this merchant, in the presumption of his wealth, has forbidden Mírzá Saleh

## Persian Children of the Royal Family

to buy food in the bazaars for no other reason than that he is teaching me Persian."

The Zill replied, "Mírzá Saleh is a small person."

"True! he is not so rich as Hájí Seyyid Hasan, sir; but he is my mírzá, and a worthy and inoffensive gentleman."

"He is a Bábí, an anarchist."

"In this instance, sir, is it not rather Hájí Seyyid Hasan who is the anarchist, the stirrer of revolt, the fomenter of strife? . . . But he is, I believe, a big person of considerable wealth."

"Şáhib," replied the Zill, "the major shall teach you Persian, Turkish, Arabic. This Mírzá Saleh is a Bábí. It will be to your interests to dispense with his services. It must not be said that my Tutor Şáhib is being taught by a convert to that pernicious faith."

I saw plainly enough that it would not be to Mírzá Saleh's interest that I should retain his services. To defend him from the charge of Bábíism would only confirm the Zill in his suspicions. The best way of serving him would be to let him slide as a person of no importance. So reflecting, I turned to the Zillu's-Sultán, and said—

"May it please your Highness, I will pay Mírzá Saleh his wages at the end of the week, and let him go. But this merchant, Hájí Seyyid Hasan, has a swollen purse, and I am assured by my European friends, all of whom either are, or have been, pupils of Mírzá Saleh, that it would redound to the peace

## A Home without a Wife

of the bazaars if that fat purse of his could be . . . lightened."

The Zillu's-Sultán beamed upon me with gratified pride, then, summoning the major into his presence, informed him that he was thenceforward to consider himself my servant, and to teach me Persian for love and not money.

"By my eyes, may I be your sacrifice!" replied the major, gravely, and retired.

I was not long in following him, and, when we met next day, I assured him that I had no intention of taking advantage of his generosity.

Shortly after my interview with the Prince, it came to pass that Hái Seyyid Hasan was reduced to submission by the payment of a fine, that the Jews regained the right to trade, and Mírzá Saleh to buy food, in the bazaars of the city of Isfahán. In dealing with the Persian at home, it is sometimes wise to yield an inch in order to grasp an ell.

## CHAPTER IV

### A BATCH OF PRINCELETS

AT the hour of dusk, when lamps are lighted, Persian servants hail their master with the greeting of “Peace be unto you!” Accordingly, when my body-servant brought in the light, he said, “Selám ’aleykúm.” Then, stretching out both his hands and bowing, he offered me a letter that lay in his palms as in a bowl. It is worth remarking, by the way, that a Persian considers it an act of rudeness to snatch at the gift proffered to him. Courtesy demands that he should reach out both his hands and wait for you to drop it into them. I took the letter. It was addressed, “A la maine de mon chere maître,” and was signed, “Feridun Mirza,” in the left bottom corner of the envelope. The word Mírzá succeeding a proper name signifies Prince, it being a contraction of Amír-zadeh, descendant of an Amír; but, when it precedes, it means a person in civil employment or a secretary.

Opening the letter, the first I had received, I began to read; then, bursting into laughter at the

## A Batch of Princelets

very first line, I gazed around me. While the spirit of my surroundings was one with the patriarchal age of Abraham, the letter, bearing the signature of "Votre eleve obeysent," was dated 18,917 A.D., by which time, presumably, the imperial scribe hoped to be reduced to obedience. The letter, moreover, which I shall transcribe *verbatim*, was free from punctuation, following the Persian custom in that particular :—

"Mercredi soir Juillet 14 18917 A.D.

"MON CHERE MAITRE MONSIEUR SPRW Je suis  
bien content Vous etes le bien venu j'espere vous  
voire bientot Votre eleve obeysent

"FERIDUN MIRZA."

When I had answered the little note in a grateful spirit, I fell into a muse over the word *obeysent*. This word, *obedient*, was of significance in my sight, because it recalled a friendly chat I had had on the question of discipline with an influential Jew in London, whose brother had been instrumental in appointing me to the tutorship. His views on the subject were of the essence of the Jewish temperament. "Discipline!" he had cried in unfeigned amazement at my ingenuousness. "Nothing of the sort, I assure you. If the young princes wish to work, you will work; if to play, you will play. When they burst out weeping, you will mingle your tears with theirs, and join in the chorus whenever

## Persian Children of the Royal Family

they are in a laughing mood. Permit me to congratulate you upon the appointment."

My thoughts were busy with this droll epitome of my duties, when my "boy" came to tell me that he had made my bed in the compound, and hung the mosquito-curtain (lent to me by my Dutch acquaintance); so, having undressed and donned my sleeping suit, I went out into the bright, moony night, and lay down under the blue blanket of the starry heavens. The croaking of a colony of frogs in the tank was toned to a lullaby, thank goodness, and so was the bubbling of the *kalyán*, which my servants were smoking, by way of a sedative, ere they wrapped themselves up for the night, in their thick dun-coloured felts. Rising with the sun next morning, I followed my two soldiers, who bore my books and writing materials across the compound of the *tékyé* to the curtained entrance of the *Diván-Kháné*, where we were met by the general in a tall, brimless hat of white lambskin. He had fair hair, a ruddy complexion, and blue eyes. A rumour went abroad that he was of Russian extraction, but I believe myself that his sole claim to that nationality lay in his knowledge of the Russian language. He it was who now conducted me up the steep stone greeze to the long marble gallery, looking down upon the garden around two sides of which range the apartments of the *Diván-Kháné*. Facing the gallery, as you will remember, is the blank wall of the imperial *andarún*, or harem, painted in blue and red arabesque, and

## A Batch of Princelets

pierced by two curtained doorways. When I passed into the room on the right, it was to find myself at last in the presence of my pupils. Dr. Mírzá Huseyn Khán, who was present, rose to receive me. The room, which I had entered from the nearer end of the gallery on this occasion, I recognized as the one in which I had been entertained, on the day of my arrival, by Iskander Khán, the Afghan prince. The six round marble tables were still there, and so were the mural maps made in Germany some twenty-five years ago. These maps had been presented, in the first instance, by Mr. Hoeltzer, of the Telegraph Department, to the Armenian schools in Julfá, but had come at last to be banished from those halls of learning as out of date. In their present position, on the walls of the imperial palace, it could not be said of them that they were antiquated : they were, rather, several centuries ahead of their surroundings in matters geographical. I turned in the direction of the blackboard, wondering whether the sum had been wiped out or not. No ; there it stood in bare-faced evidence of the fact that Persian princes, finding it more profitable to receive, are quick to misapply the golden rule of Compound Division. I smiled. Thereupon the young princes, six in number, leaping to their feet, lined up in their baggy white socks and tall astrakhan hats, and returned the smile right cheerfully. This time my smile grew musical.

As all Persians, full-grown, retain certain traits

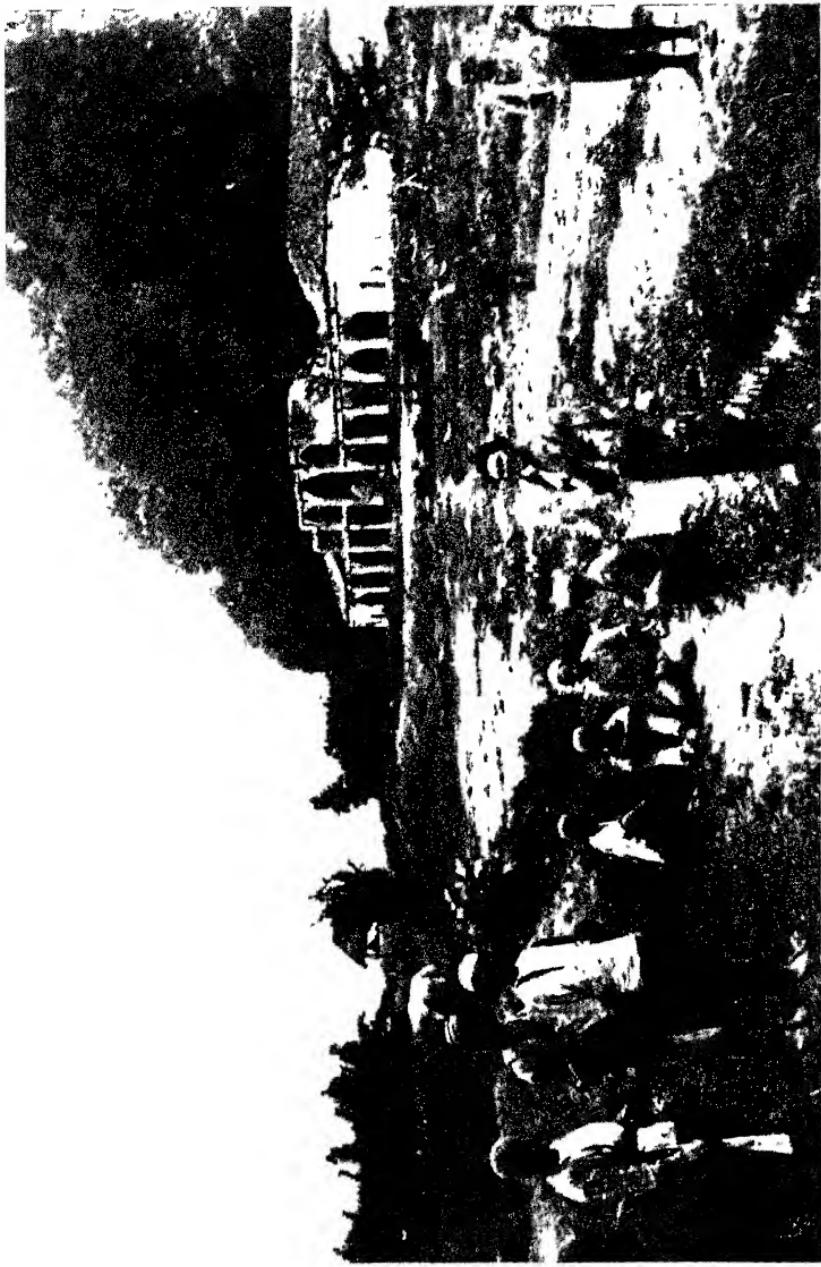
## Persian Children of the Royal Family

of the Eternal Child, so all Persian boys are dressed from early childhood as full-grown men. My pupils, being imperial princes, affected the national Court dress. The overcoat is buttoned at the neck, has a straight military collar, fits tight at the waist, whence it falls in plaits innumerable to below the knees. Save the button at the neck, the coat should be left open in front, so as to display the gaudy undercoat of silk or of velvet. The colour of both coats is a matter of choice, except in the month of Muḥarram, when black is the only wear. The artistic sense in my pupils displayed itself in purple and yellow; in Persian cashmere of many colours and ruby; in autumnal tints, brown and red; and in grey and light blue—the second colour in each case being that of the *arkhālik*, or inner coat.

The first to step to the front and shake me by the hand was Bahrám Mírzá, a miniature study in grey and blue. He reached out for my hand, saying in French—

“Soyez le bien-venu, monsieur. J'espère que vous vous soyez tout à fait rétabli.”

Standing, as he did, in his amazing white socks, *kuldh* on head, I could not but admire the unconscious dignity of his bearing. I looked him in the face: his eyes are dark and unfathomably deep; his mouth vies with his chin in firmness and resolution; his nose is small, and inclined to be flat. In stature he is short and sturdy. When I told him to sit down, he did so in silence, fixing his impenetrable



ON THE ROAD TO RUSTAMĀBĀD : SHOWING A WAYSIDE REST-HOUSE IN RUINS



## A Batch of Princelets

eyes upon my face. I could see that nothing escaped his grave scrutiny. His eyes, the most beautiful I ever beheld, are the index of his mind—deep, searching, observant, intellectually vain, and yet twinkling suddenly with boyish roguery.

“A diplomat in the germ,” I said to the doctor, in an aside.

“You will find him intelligent,” was the guarded reply.

The next boy to bid me welcome was Akbar Mírzá : he was dressed in Persian cashmere and ruby silk. A dashing, free-and-easy youngster, tall and handsome, he is his father’s favourite son. His wavy hair of an uncommon colour, a ruddy black, curls all round to the brim of his tall *kuldh*. When he shook hands with me, it was to say in English, with manifest pride at his fluency of speech,—

“How do you do—yes, sair? I am content to see you, and I hope you are better.”

“And how old are you?” I asked.

His reply smacked of Ollendorf. “I do not know, sair,”—then, thoughtfully: “but I have been to Teheran.”

I was at my wits’ end to divine the connection.

“Indeed,” I said. “When was that?”

This time his reply, in French, gave me something of a shock.

“Lorsque j’étais dans le vent re de ma mère, monsieur.”

His artless simplicity was evident enough.

## Persian Children of the Royal Family

I turned to the doctor, my mouth framing itself to the dot of a note of exclamation.

"Quite so," he replied, unmoved. "But we Persians, whether we be young or whether we be old, have no false shame to swear by in our innocence."

Telling Akbar Mírzá, the Ingenuous and Magnificent, to sit down in his turn, I awaited the greeting of the gentlemanly lad in autumnal tints, brown and red. He proved to be Ferídún Mírzá. I was specially interested in him as the writer of the forward-looking letter. The oldest and the tallest of my pupils, his delicate high-bred face wore an expression of pensive aloofness from the vivid, alert youngster who stood chafing at his elbow.

"Thank you for your letter," I said, when he had told me his name. "It was good of you to write to me."

"Yes, sair, but it wase my muzzer; she said, 'The Şâhib will be lonely,' and I write."

Then he turned to his companion, and gave him an angry look.

The latter, Humáyún Mírzá by name, singled himself out from his brothers by virtue of a temperament toned to his purple velvet frock-coat and his yellow *arkhdlik* of satin. While Bahrám Mírzá might be described as the diplomat in the germ, Ferídún Mírzá as the gentleman in the mould, and Akbar Mírzá as the man of the world in little, Humáyún Mírzá stood revealed as the pure,

## A Batch of Princelets

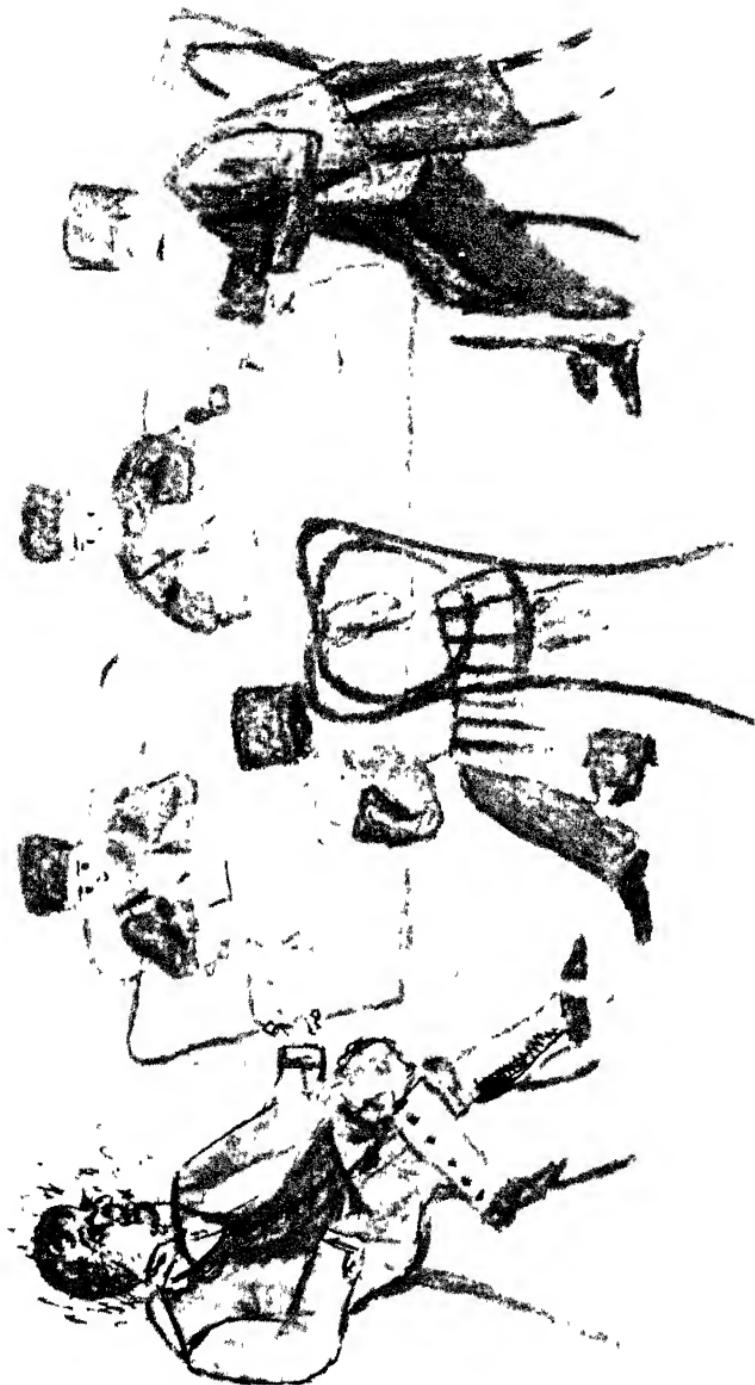
unsophisticated, barbarian boy. His flashing eyes are large and wide open ; his nose is an eagle's beak, all but ; his mouth, an excitable feature, trembles, like a wave, between the foamy crest of passion and the still deeps of remorse. He is as straight as an arrow, as lithe as a cat, as wild as an untrained colt. Eager to bid me welcome, he positively danced with impatience whilst I was talking to Ferídún Mírzá. When his turn came at last, he leaped to my side, and seized me impulsively by both hands, crying out, in a ringing voice that carried conviction with it, “*J'aime vous que vous ne sais pâs—oui !*” The last word was thrown defiantly in the teeth of his half-brothers, like a challenge. It was as though the stormy youngster felt instinctively that he had found a friend and protector at last. That he was at times in sore need of a second the sequel will show.

The fifth boy, Isma'il Mírzá, Bahrám's brother, has a merry twinkling face. Having neither English nor French, he greeted me in mellifluous Persian, in a pretty, chirruping voice. He and his half-brother, Ardashír Mírzá, do not come into this narrative at all.

The introductions over, we set to work, and Akbar Mírzá (much to my surprise, for he has splendid-looking eyes) put on a pair of spectacles. I began by giving them a piece of French dictation, by way of testing their knowledge of the language. We were in the middle of the lesson when Akbar Mírzá, the Magnificent, laying down his pen, and

## Persian Children of the Royal Family

taking off his spectacles, complained of the heat (105° in the shade), saying, “It is too hot—yes, sair?” I made no reply; whereupon he resumed his work: but long before I uttered the words, “Point; c'est tout” (“Full stop; that's all”), he had lifted up his voice once more. This time his tone was loud and imperious. “Bachah!” (“Child!”), he cried, Persian servants being always summoned and addressed as their master's “children.” To my amazement in stepped the stately general, and stood in an attitude of grave humility, at a respectful distance, his head bowed and his hands folded at the waist. “Ab-i-khwurdán” (“Drinking-water”) was Akbar's word, and smart the *sartip*'s action. Out he went, and back he came with a silver tea-pot in his hand. Very solemnly and slowly he went the round of the class, and, raising the spout to each thirsty little mouth in turn, waited in patient silence until the imperial thirst had been quenched. Whilst one princelet was being served, his neighbour, eyeing the silver nipple, sucked his lips in anticipation of the refreshing draught. As for me, it was mine to revel in the humour of the scene, which was followed soon after by an interlude in which our friend the major, in full dress, was summoned by Bahrám Mírzá, the Imperious, to clean his slate. The climax of the ludicrous, however, was attained when Ferídún Mírzá, having to leave the room in a hurry, was escorted to his destination by the general, the major, a black eunuch, and a small urchin, his trusty



“ENGLISH DICTATION” IN A PERSIAN PALACE.  
*Drašnā i Sultan Mālūn ad-Hāzī (on the extremities)*



## A Batch of Princelets

hench-boy, who were called together by him in the voice of one *in articulo mortis*.

These interruptions tickled my sense of humour, undoubtedly, but they achieved a more useful end than that. They were the means of showing me that the first thing I should have to teach these youthful Kájárs was, not modern languages, nor mathematics, nor science, but rather the first principles of self-reliance, self-help, self-independence. However, the incidents of the first morning in my little school, following, as they did, in quick succession, left me scarce a moment for reflection. For the first time in my school experiences, the part I played on my *début* as tutor to the sons of the Shadow of the King was, in the main, that of an amused spectator. It was not until I began to score their exercises in French dictation that a more prominent rôle was thrust upon me. Then it was that I became the centre of attraction. Whilst I was correcting Bahrám Mírzá's dictation, young Humáyún bounded to my side, squatted at my feet, and examined my boots. "Papa-pa-pa-pa!" he babbled, in a very rapture of admiration. His ingenuous chuckling drew the others around him, and they, sinking to their heels in like manner, turned the class-room into a poultry-yard with their exclamations of delight. From my boots they ran their fingers slowly up my socks and trousers, then up my waistcoat, then round and about my coat, not a single button escaping their scrutiny, till they came at last to the shining expanse

## Persian Children of the Royal Family

of my shirt-front, whereupon a murmuring of steel breastplates and hand-to-hand combats reached my ear. And then, having fingered my studs and collar and tie and watch-guard, the boys stood up, and, clapping their hands together, cried out in a gleeful chorus, as at a common inspiration, “The Sáhib is a voluptuary (*khwush-guzrán*) ! a voluptuary ! Ma-sha’lláh ! ” Humáyún Mírzá, throwing himself into the most fantastic attitudes the while he glided slowly across the room, waving his hands in likeness of a Persian dancer, and singing out at the top of his voice in a shrill minor key—

“*Khaiili masti ast—ba-ali-i !*” (“He is voluptuous, and no mistake ! ”).

Class over, Ferídún Mírzá came to me and said in English—

“ You are content-a wiz me—yes, sair ? ”

I patted him on the back. “ Certainly I am, old boy,” I replied.

The others, following the leader, received the same answer.

It was Bahrám Mírzá who paused for an explanation.

“ Why do you say ‘old boy’ ? ” he asked. “ Is not a boy young ? ”

“ Certainly, young man,” I replied ; “ but the expression ‘old boy’ is a figure of speech, a term of affection. Do you not summon a servant, however old, by the word *bachah*, or ‘Child’ ? So I might call you ‘old boy,’ or ‘old fellow,’ or ‘old

## A Batch of Princelets

man,' because I like you very much. Do you understand?"

They all assured me that they understood perfectly.

In the course of the afternoon Ferídún Mírzá wrote to me again. The letter was delivered into my hands, as is the custom, by a black eunuch of the Imperial harem. The opening line, as you will judge for yourself, testifies to the truth of the maxim which saith that "a little learning is a dangerous thing."

"OLD MAN I hope you arre in a good hellz Me  
I am too very much fattigued to rest in the *andarún*  
all lonly wiz my muzzer If you permitt one of  
my buzzers wiz me we will come to your house a  
little speeke and ply *Your old boy*

"FERIDUN."

Master Hopeful, receiving an affirmative reply, hastened to thank me for my kindness, bringing Akbar Mírzá with him. The two boys were accompanied by the major, a Nubian eunuch, and an outdoor servant. When I had dismissed the escort, I asked Ferídún what he had meant by saying that he was "all lonly" in the harem.

"Surely," said I, "you have your brothers to play with?"

But that was not the case. The boys, being born of different mothers, live quite apart from one another, each in his mother's private apartments, until they

## Persian Children of the Royal Family

reach the age of puberty, when they leave the harem. They are allowed to visit each other but seldom, the Aghá-Báshí, whose permission, as the ruler supreme over every soul within the sacred portals, it is no easy matter to gain, seeking, with not a little success, to stem the current of intrigue by keeping each family cribbed, cabined, and confined. There is an immense compound, it is true, which the Zill's wives share in common, but even there the belligerent sex is held in check by the presence of ever-watchful eunuchs. An exception is made in the case of Ferídún's mother, who, as a Princess of the House of Kájár, has a garden all to herself. The name she goes by in the harem is that of the "Little Lady."

"You should see the big garden at night in summer-time," said Ferídún Mírzá in French. "In the hot weather the wives of his Highness sleep out of doors. All the beds used for the purpose are brought out into the garden, and placed along the paths between the flower-beds, and the mosquito-curtains are hung above them. Everything is white, just like a camp, but the wives of his Highness are really prisoners when they are in bed, for the beds are so high from the ground that the women can only get into them by means of a ladder, and when they are in bed the eunuchs come and take the ladder away!"

Then Akbar Mírzá, assuming his man-of-the-worldly air, contributed his quota of information in voluble English.

## A Batch of Princelets

“Yes, sair,” he said, rolling for me a cigarette in the shape of a sugar-loaf; “it is very droll. When the time commences to make cold, then two wives of his Highness sleep in one bed for to keep them hot. Why you not marry yourself—yes, sair? It more gay would be, less sade—yes, sair?”

“And less free, my boy,” I replied.

“It is the women who are not free in Persia; but the men, they are free!” was Akbar’s reply, quick and spirited.

“And what do the ladies of the *andarūn* do all the day long?” I asked in French.

“Well, monsieur,” replied Ferídún, “they eat, they say their prayers, they make cakes a little, and they smoke the *kalydn* a plenty; they sleep after *nahár* every day, and they have a *hammám* every week; and if they can, they read a little, and they receive their guests; and then—well, monsieur, that is all. There is nothing else for them to do. They are only women.”

“But how about their children!” I exclaimed.  
“Do they not educate them?”

“Sometimes,” said Ferídún Mírzá; but Akbar lighted the cigarette he had rolled ere he said a word. That done, he handed me the cigarette, saying—

“You see, sair, his Highness loves not them to have children, and they are not very clever. You see—yes, sair?”

The obvious conclusion was that the mothers of

## Persian Children of the Royal Family

my pupils were the Zill's favourite wives. I drew the inference in all good-faith. The effect of the expression upon the boys was sudden and startling.

"No, sair," said Akbar Mírzá, very gravely ; "you deceive yourself. Our mothers are not the 'favourite' wives of his Highness. They are our mothers."

"Oui, monsieur," said Ferídún Mírzá, "they are our mothers. His Highness owes them respect. A favourite he can have every year, every month, every week, every day, if he wishes. But our mothers, they are for always. His Highness owes them respect."

"Nothing disrespectful was suggested, dear boy," I said.

"Non, non, monsieur; not by you, I know," replied Ferídún; "but it is serious. In Persia there are two marriages. The one is for always: the other is for a long time or a short time—it is for the man to say how long. Sometimes he says for one year, sometimes he says for nine-and-ninety years. When he says for one year or part of a year, it is bad. When he says for nine-and-ninety years, it is very good—oui, monsieur? For then the marriage is as good as the marriage for always. Vous voyez—oui, monsieur?"

Before the boys returned to the harem, they asked me to sing an English song. When I had sung "Rule, Britannia," Ferídún Mírzá, who had listened attentively, turned to me and said—

## A Batch of Princelets

"You looked so proud and so happy when you were singing that song ! Why was that, monsieur ?"

"Oh," said I, feeling not a little sheepish, "I suppose it was because I am an Englishman."

"Then," said Ferídún, "when I sing I shall look very proud and very happy because I am a Persian—oui, monsieur ?"

"Certainly, my boy," I replied.

Next morning, in school, he came to tell me that his mother, the Little Lady, was displeased with him because of the remark he had made.

"My soul," she had said to her son, "you should say to the Sáhib, 'When I sing I shall look very proud and very happy because my tutor is an Englishman.' Then the Sáhib will rejoice, because you are grateful to Alláh, who is knowing and wise."

The world was right when it called her the "Little Lady."

Of the six pupils I had then, and of the nine I had a few months later, only two were born of the same mother. These were Bahrám Mírzá, the clever ambitious boy, and Ism'aíl Mírzá, the youngster with the merry twinkling face. They were devoted to each other, these two, inseparable allies, staunch friends, and loving brothers. But even among the half-brothers the rivalry was not unfriendly, save in one instance only. All of them, the whole pack, made common cause against Humáyún Mírzá, whose mother, a convert and a Kurd, had been of the Sunni persuasion of the Muhammadan faith ; and

## Persian Children of the Royal Family

it is said of the Shi'ah, to which sect the Persians belong, that he will turn away from the pleasure of killing a Christian, if a Sunni, unarmed, happens to be within reach of his knife. Hence the probability is that each mother egged on her son, whose fanaticism was not more than skin-deep, to harass the child of her Sunni rival. Be this supposition right or wrong, one fact is certain : it was a fortunate thing that Humáyún Mírzá, a delectable pickle, knew neither fear nor discretion. Half Kurd, half Kájár, he was born to be a fighter, and I am bound to say that scarce a day passed but he had the opportunity of showing his mettle. Sometimes the pugnacious young scamp was well within his rights. Sometimes he was as obviously in the wrong. One instance of his unbridled passion and quick remorse belongs here.

The term was only two days gone when Ferídún Mírzá happened to twit his half-brother, Humáyún Mírzá, because he was a Kurd on his mother's side. Whereupon the fiery youngster, leaping to his feet, cried out in Persian—

“That I am a Kurd is true. To be a Kurd is to be brave. To be a Persian is to be a coward. He that despises me because I am a Kurd shall be defiled with the flesh that he declares to be unclean. You look hungry, Ferídún Mírzá. It is well. Behold a Kurdish *kebdé*.”

It was at that moment that I entered the room. Before I had time to inquire what the hubbub was



PRINCE HUMÁYÚN MÍRZA 1808



## A Batch of Princelets

about, Humáyún Mírzá had bitten a piece of flesh out of the palm of his hand, and spat it clean in Ferídún's face. Then, turning to me and gesticulating wildly, he told me what the squabble was about, in voluble French, and droll beyond belief. I told Ferídún Mírzá that his religion should teach him to be charitable, and Humáyún Mírzá that he should prove his courage by mastering his temper. Then I chastised both culprits severely. While Ferídún Mírzá took his chastisement tearfully, Humáyún Mírzá ground his teeth and glowered upon me like one possessed of the devil. Every now and then, as the lesson progressed, he would set me at defiance by crying out in his quaint French, "J'ai quel fette?" and would bang down his tall hat on the table as a supreme assertion of his contempt for civilization! After which he would give his lacerated hand an affectionate look and murmur, "Mon Dieu, comme il bât! c'est comme un cœur!" ("Dear me, how it beats! it's like a heart!") Though I divined from the first that it was not in him to bear malice, I was wholly unprepared for the action he took when school was over for the day.

Escaping from the harem after tiffin, he came to my house all by himself (a breach of Court etiquette of unprecedented audacity), and, stealing in the rear of me, as I sat smoking my post-prandial cigar, threw his arms about my neck in an agony of contrition, sobbing out the while—

"Je . . . très . . . peloré . . . parceque . . .

## Persian Children of the Royal Family

je . . . très mauvais . . . mais . . . j'aime . . .  
vous . . . que . . . tu . . . ne sais . . . pâs . . .  
oui ! . . .”

“And you're sorry for losing your temper?” I asked.

He raised both hands to his cheeks, the palms upward.

“Très, mosie!” he cried.

“And what will your mother do to you when she finds out that you have run away?”

“Elle mordra moi dans le brâs, mosie.”

Of course! I had forgotten that his mother was a Kurd. Was it the look in my face that nettled the lad? Perhaps it was, for he flung back his head defiantly, saying—

“Elle est très brave, mon mère, très! et j'aime elle aussi que vous ne sais pâs, oui!”

“And though you knew that your mother would bite you in the arm for running away, you came to tell me that you were sorry for losing your temper this morning?” I asked.

“Oui, mosie mon ami.”

I reached out for his hand in silence. “Do you see the whip, Humáyún?”

“Oui, mosie mon ami.”

“You will feel it, my boy, if you ever kiss me again. Do you understand?”

“Oui, mosie mon ami.”

“The English custom is to shake hands. Men never kiss each other in England. Don't forget that.”

## A Batch of Princelets

“Très bien, mosie mon ami. Je suis petit soldat —oui, mosie ?”

“One of the best,” I replied.

“Très bien. Maintenant je vais chez mon mère.”

But I took care to provide him with a safe-conduct before he left the house.

The only punishment that ever taught this amazing lad to wince was to debar him from taking part in gymnastics. The mere threat was enough to reduce him to the ranks. Clenching his fists, and dancing with dismay, he would run up to me, crying out in a very ecstasy of appeal—

“Si—si, mosie mon ami, fette-moi faire de gymnastique ! si non, mon force il vâ ! oui, mosie, mon force il vâ !” Then, conjuring up the calamity of the loss of his strength in all its horror, he would burst into tears.

His French, when written, was a puzzle, defying elucidation. The following specimen, however, is comparatively clear and simple :—

“bon jour Mosie mon ami et mon cher mester  
esparo gomen vous por té vous je trè ojurdhui je  
tré peloré par se que vous napas fé de jimnastiq aprè  
jai dit jai ql fette—Votre eleve

“HOMAYN MIRZA.”

The last words, “aprè jai dit jai ql fette,” being interpreted, mean, “After which I said to myself, ‘What (evil) have I done?’”

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A delectable pickle and an inimitable mimic was Humáyún Mírzá. He delighted in histrionic display. He was no respecter of persons ; he would take off anybody and everybody who struck his fancy. The foppish airs and graces and mincing accents of his cousins ; Dr. Mírzá Huseyn Khán's suave urbanity and his customary greeting, “*La santé va bien, jeune prince ?*” my septuagenarian predecessor's unexampled gait suggesting that of a galvanized paralytic, and his wife's old-maidenly manner of walking as of a camel in hobbles ;—all these characteristics were seized upon by the audacious youngster, and made to live again in him. His powers of observation for surface peculiarities and mannerisms outrivalled those of the ape. I will not give myself away by revealing my own idiosyncrasies. It will be enough to say that, having seen myself as Humáyún Mírzá saw me, I have ceased to pray for the “*giftie*” divine. He was a born actor. His character-sketches, in truth and in restraint alike, were of a piece with the finished portraits of Mr. John Hare and Mr. Cyril Maude, who would have to look to their laurels were this incomparable child of the house of Kájár an Englishman and an actor.

## CHAPTER V

### THE LAYING ON OF "THE STICKS"

DURING the first weeks of my residence at the Zillu's-Sultán's Court, I encouraged his children unconsciously to reveal themselves to me, to the end that I might learn to know their characters. The necessity of finding a common footing was urgent. Consider this : There sat my six Persian princelings in their black lambskin headgear and baggy white socks ; there was I, their English tutor, with my hat off and my boots on ; and, separating us more surely than the outlandish fashion of our respective garments, were the unexplored wastes of our rival civilizations, mine being as barren to them as theirs was to me. Obviously, the problem was to discover, as it were, an oasis, cool and ever green, where both pupils and teacher might meet in the spirit of harmony. In my eagerness to find the common chord, I turned a deaf ear to the discords which would come rushing in, the young princes airing their French and English with a fearlessness of consequences and a contempt for grammar which

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showed that the whip was not yet in use as a corrective influence. By winning their confidence at the outset, I achieved the end I had in prospect. Their racial characteristics, traits more or less superficial, grew dimmer and still more dim upon a closer view, until at last, emerging from the shallows of Islám and the like—the veriest shallows in their case—they stood revealed as pure, human, barbarian boys. A very important discovery this, and a helpful one too : by means of it I might be said to join hands once more with the dear barbarian boys I had left behind me in England ; hence, feeling myself to be no longer a stranger in an alien land, I began to set my class in order.

The leading source of annoyance in school-time was the curiosity of the Zill's courtiers, who positively took my class-room by storm, slaking their avowed thirst for culture by squatting at what they were pleased to call "the source of knowledge"—in other words, my feet. My pupils' industry might wax or wane, nothing seemed to stem the scholarly zeal of these uninvited guests, whose cackling exclamations of "Ma-sha'lláh ! " "Ajab ! " "Pa-pa-pa-pa-pa ! " would set the whole class tittering. The intrusion of a red *mulla* one fine morning tried my patience beyond endurance. He was the first priest to defile himself in so public a fashion. I took care that he should be the last. Turning to Bahram Mírzá, whose colloquial knowledge of French made interpretation easy, I said—

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“Please to tell the *mulla* that I am flattered by his condescension in visiting a Firangí in his little school, and say that I hope to return the compliment to-morrow by paying him a visit at his mosque at the hour of midday prayer.”

Bahrám Mírzá seized the occasion of interpreting the snub with an eagerness I had not expected. Although the words were none of his, he contrived to infuse them with a spirit all his own. The *mulla*’s bearing, though fierce and sanctimonious, yielded to the sting of the unexpected greeting, and when he rose and tiptoed from the room, he was followed, at a wave of my hand, by the crestfallen courtiers of the Zill, Bahrám Mírzá clapping his hands in triumph to be quit of them, and crying in a voice of inimitable self-complacency—

“ You are content-a wiz me—yes, sair ? ”

This mischievous nuisance being settled satisfactorily, the next thing to do was to reduce my pupils to the ranks—a task in which I was aided more than a little by fortune. In a country where To-morrow is more important than To-day, I was prepared to find the virtue of punctuality to be more honoured in the breach than the observance, and the experiences of those first weeks bore out my expectations to the full. But first you must remember that the Persians regulate their watches by the setting of the sun : that is to say, at sundown all well-regulated Persian watches should point to twelve o’clock. The manner of telling the time from that moment is a question of

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so many hours after sunset for the first six hours, or so many hours after sunrise for the next six hours. The meeting of the hands once more at the figure XII. is called by the Persians the *desteh*. Thus one o'clock p.m. is one hour after the *desteh*, or five hours before sunset. This method of reckoning time being understood, all I can say of the unpunctuality of the children of the House of Kájár is that it clamoured for an everlasting eclipse of the sun. That fiery orb, as I was told upon my arrival by Bahrám Mírzá, suffers an early morning eclipse in the month of Muḥarram, out of respect for the untimely deaths of Huseyn and Hasan! How, then, he asked, could I expect him and his brothers to be in time for early morning school? The next day the youngsters were late again. Their excuse on that occasion was that they had been to the wedding-feast of a relative of theirs on the previous day. I looked Bahrám Mírzá in the eyes: they were unfathomably deep. I sounded him, confident that it would be worth my while.

“So you plead indigestion as the cause of your unpunctuality?” I said.

The lad remained silent for the space of a few moments; then, tilting his head over the left shoulder, a favourite attitude of his, he gazed at me through half-closed lids, his eyes twinkling at some sudden thought.

“No, sair,” he said at last, “I am well—very. It is not the indigestion, it is the sun.”

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“Of course !”

“Mais oui, monsieur,” he made haste to reply, his eyes all laughter and wide open, “même le soleil se lève tard pendant la lune de miel !” (“Really, sir, even the sun gets up late during the honeymoon !”) The merry twinkle in those flashing eyes of his was irresistible : do what I would, I could not restrain a smile, which grew audible, when the irrepressible wit, resuming his birdlike attitude, laid hold of my hand and said, “You are my friend to-day—yes, sair ?”

It was clearly impossible to be anything else. Nor did the question of punctuality come a whit nearer a final settlement on the morrow. But on the third day after the expulsion of the red *mulla*, my sense of humour being somewhat blunted, I came the stern disciplinarian over my all but incorrigible pupils. Ferídún Mírzá, who was the last to put in an appearance, had to bear the brunt of my impatience. His pensive cast of countenance, untroubled by a spark of contrition, nettled me beyond the common.

“Late again !” I cried.

“Yes, sair !” This from Ferídún, in a voice designed to suggest a careless inquiry, as who should say, “I’m not sure of my watch, but I rely on yours !”

“Do you think I’m your servant, jeune prince ?” I asked.

“Y-yes, sair—n-no—no, sair—I not know, sair,” said Ferídún, somewhat alarmed.

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“When I have given you a sound thrashing, my friend, I shall leave you to settle the point at your leisure ;” and so saying, I suited the action to the threat. Oh Lord ! I’m glad my tutoring days are over ! The lad screamed like a rabbit caught in a gin—a piteous sound. All my pupils divined, I hope and believe, how hard it was for me to steel my heart against their inroads upon my compassion. To be cruel only to be kind cost me many a purgatorial qualm. Every blow I ever struck raised a moral blister on my back. But I was something more than a mere tutor in Persia. As the only Englishman about the Court, I came to be regarded by my co-mates as the representative of my country, and thus it behoved me to keep the flag a-flying at all costs.

When I was in the middle of a cigar, the fifth eunuch of the imperial harem came to discuss terms of peace. My refusal to admit the ebony gentleman (for I was resolved to deal with the Prince only) brought the fourth eunuch to my abode, with a message from my pupils of unconditional surrender ; and he, being sent about his business, was followed by the third, and the third by the second, until, at last, his Excellency Aghá-Báshí, chief of the tribe at the court of the Zillu’s-Sultán, came panting into my compound, followed by his obsequious slaves. His request to have speech with me met with Sádik’s reply that the Sáhib would resume his duties only at the command of his Imperial Highness.

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That the whole harem was in an agony of alarm lest the question of discipline should reach the Prince's ears, was plain from the invasion of my premises by these gentlemen-in-waiting upon the ladies of the *andarún*; and I saw in my dismissal of their chief the only certain means of probing the question to the core. The ruse was successful. My absence was reported to the Zill. When I returned to the class-room, which I did in obedience to his command, it was to find him standing before the mural map of Europe and Asia.

“Sáhib,” he cried in his discordant voice, “come here.” Then he asked me to point out the towns of London and Isfahán. This being done, he stretched his arms from the one to the other, his fleshy nose flattening itself against the map, and said meditatively, “Loin—très loin !” The next thing he ordered me to do—his thirst for knowledge geographical being still unsatisfied—was to show him the whereabouts of the British possessions in the two continents. I had reached Singapore, and was on the point of putting my finger upon another little patch of red, when he brought the lesson to a close.

“Enough ! Enough !” he cried. “You English are a masterful race. You have possessed yourselves of all the ports ; the sea you have made your own ; and half the dry land you claim as your inheritance. You rule over half the world in the name of Justice. A trustworthy race. So are the Germans. But——” His eyes fixed themselves

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upon the territory of a rival Power, and he shook his head significantly. Then, with startling abruptness, "Speak!"

I made a clean breast of his sons' unpunctuality, Bahrám Mírzá acting as interpreter; then went on to say that, while I was proud to be his "serviteur," I refused to be treated by his children as their "domestique." The latter word caught his ear at once, and he tumbled to the subtle distinction.

"Domestique, non!" he roared, turning upon the interpreter at his elbow, and boxing his ears right and left at every word. "Excellence, oui! Domestique, non!" Then, having repeated the words to each boy in turn (same "business"), he strode along, very deliberately, to the trembling eunuchs, who were lining the walls, and thrashed them round the room with his cane in a manner both dignified and effective. After which he reached out for my hand, saying in Persian, "Did not I tell you to use 'the sticks'? You have a whip handy. Use it."

"Well . . . it is ordered," I replied; whereat the Prince beamed humorously upon me, and then left the room.

Can you picture Bahrám Mírzá's face when he translated his father's last words of advice? There were in his character certain traits that flashed out red. These were danger-signals. He flung back his head, not defiantly, but with a certain fearless pride, so much as to say that the advice referred to



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his brothers, but not to himself. I liked the lad all the more for his plucky bearing and frankness of speech ; but when I came to relate the episode to a German friend of mine, I was advised by him to spare the rod in the case of Bahrám Mírzá, whose character, according to my friend, was that of a Hamlet in little, very proud, revengeful, ambitious. I am bound to say that the warning, based upon so inapt a comparison (Hamlet, of course, seeking to substantiate the “antic disposition” he had put on by calling himself names), caused me no uneasiness worth mentioning.

Revengeful, Bahrám Mírzá is not. He is certainly proud, but his pride is purely intellectual, of a piece with his ambition. Being vain of his ability, and conscious of his powers of concentration—the latter a quality in which his race is singularly deficient—he is naturally eager to be first in all branches of study. Yet his is nothing if not a discriminating spirit. While he loathes nothing so much as to be damned with faint praise, he will shy away contemptuously from fulsome flattery. Two incidents bear out what I say. On several occasions my pupils were examined by Persians holding official positions. The first examiner was the Persian Consul-General in Bombay, who was the Prince’s guest at Isfahán on his journey from India to Teherán. Struck with Bahrám’s originality and cleverness, he went the length of declaring him to be the most brilliant Kájár living.

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"Your Excellency forgets," said thirteen-year-old Bahrám, "that his Highness, my father, is not dead yet."

The examination over, Bahrám Mírzá summed up his impressions of the Consul-General in a single exclamation, curt and contemptuous, "Quel imbécile que ce consul-là !" and thenceforward his commiseration for his fellow-countrymen at Bombay was unfeigned.

The next man to examine my class was the Governor of Shiráz, who paid the Prince a visit on the way to the capital, having resigned office. The Zillu's-Sultán and his minister, Dr. Mírzá Huseyn Khán, were present at the examination. The report of the examiner, himself a first-rate French scholar, kindled in Bahrám Mírzá a smouldering resentment which burst into flame on the following day. Passing over the brilliancy of Bahrám Mírzá's answers and the correctness of his French, he singled out Ferídún Mírzá for special commendation, because he had a better accent. To crown Bahrám's undeserved humiliation, his father, waxing exceeding wroth, accused him of idleness and stupidity, and of "eating dirt." But, next morning, the Prince, wishing to read a leading article in a French paper which had come by post, ordered Bahrám Mírzá to translate it for him. Then it was that the lad, still nursing his resentment to keep it warm, seized the occasion as his own.

"May I be your sacrifice, your Highness," he said, reaching out for the newspaper. "This article

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I will give to Ferídún Mírzá, whose French accent will enable him to put it into Persian with an accuracy that I cannot hope to achieve.”

Then, leaving the Prince to ponder over the retort courteous, he entered the class-room and told me what had taken place. I need not say that I insisted both upon his translating the article and upon his begging the Prince’s pardon for his show of temper. Ferídún Mírzá, whose pensive countenance had worn an expression of blank dismay at sight of the leading article, brightened up more than a little when Bahrám Mírzá, knitting a meditative brow, snatched it from him and set to work.

One more story of Bahrám Mírzá will complete my portrait of a remarkable lad. I think the incident deserves a memory. It occurred when the war between Spain and the United States was only a month old. Bahrám’s intelligent interest in the unequal struggle was fostered by my keeping him posted up in the daily telegraphic news. Then, our expectation of events growing more eager every morning, we took sides. His sympathy, all for the success of Spain, was a break in the continuity of my teaching that the welfare of the English-speaking races redounds to the prosperity of the world, making, as it does, for equity and freedom ; that the territorial integrity of Persia and of China is closely knit in the triumph of the Anglo-Saxon principle ; and it was therefore to our behoof, both as builders of empire and as pioneers of civilization, so to handle

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every political situation as to subordinate all lesser issues to the vindication of our leading motive. Where British aims were concerned, I could carry him along with me to the crest of my desire ; but the hope that his desire for our success would lead him to espouse the cause of the United States was not realized.

“I can understand your sympathy for the weaker man in a hand-to-hand tussle,” I said. “It is a manly attitude, sportsmanlike and natural, and does you credit. But in this war it is wrong to regard the United States as the Goliath of hectoring strength, and Spain as the David of Justice, arming her weakness with spiritual truth. The United States, going down to the sea, stretches out her hand over the waters, and says to the islands sunk in the darkness of sloth, ‘Let there be light !’ Your Spain, on the other hand, clings to the hem of the New World, and cries out, in effect, in the pride of her departing glory, ‘Here mediævalism shall reign, and spiritual hypochondria ; private judgment and free thought and virile liberty shall find no entrance here ! Only over my dead body shall you light the torch we flung away centuries ago.’ No, my boy, in this unequal struggle it is the stronger man who is in the right. He bears the torch. There shall be light, believe me, in the isles of the morning and the afternoon sun : *In-sha’llâh ! In-sha’llâh !*”

Bahrám Mirzá cocked his head on the left shoulder and closed the right eye.

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“Where would your Yankees be now,” he cried, “if Columbus had not discovered America ?”

I positively gasped for breath at the outrageous question. Then, taking my courage in both hands, I “went for” the past history of Spain, drawing the contrast between the Spanish and the Anglo-Saxon principles as they are embodied in the everyday life of the inhabitants of North and of South America. When I had finished my little lecture, he craved permission to say a few words.

“Please, sir,” he mused in French, “didn’t you tell me, when you came first, that the Latin races were, and are still, inclined to retaliate upon their kings if their arms suffered, or have suffered, a defeat ? If the Spaniards should be defeated, might they not depose their little king ? And do you expect *me* to have sympathy with Republicans ? Vivent les rois ! ”

“How about France ?” I asked. “Do you mean to say that you have no sympathy with the French ?”

“I love them,” he replied. “But do you think that the French are true Republicans, sir ? I think that they are not. They went mad with joy to see my grandfather, Násiru’d-Dín Sháh, in Paris : they gave him a right royal welcome. They put me in mind of the New Women you were telling me about the other day. They think they can rule themselves, but in their hearts they know—yes, monsieur, they know—that they are only waiting for the man who shall rule them.”

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These words, spoken, as they were, before the Fashoda affair and the home-coming of Captain Dreyfus, showed a remarkable insight into the mal-content spirit of latter-day France. Evidently Bahrám Mírzá had read his French newspapers to good purpose. There is nothing that this boy could not learn, given the means and the opportunity. Never had tutor a more promising pupil. He is now close upon seventeen years old—an age when many a Persian has taken to himself a wife—yet I believe him to be still in the schoolroom, “Il hem dilláh !” (“Praise be to God !”). Being endowed by nature with many of the special gifts which go to the making of a diplomatist of the first rank, he might rise to play a leading part in the future of Persian politics, were he not a prince of the blood and a son of the Zillu’s-Sultán. For “’tis true ’tis pity ; and pity ’tis ’tis true,” that a muleteer or a camel-driver stands a better chance of forcing his way to the front in political life in Persia than does a child of the House of Kájár. Hence the probability is that Bahrám Mírzá’s career will be a long agony of thwarted ambition and hopes deferred. The down-fall of his eldest brother, the Jalálu’d-Dawla, in July, 1897, set him pondering over his own future.

“What should I like to be ?” he said, in answer to my question. “I should like to be a driver of asses, that I might rise to be a driver of men ! As a prince, I stand no chance whatever. Every field will be closed to me. Take the case of my big

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brother, the Jalálu'd-Dawla, for instance. In the days of my father's power, he ruled, as deputy in leading-strings, over the province of Fars, when he was only my age, thirteen years old. There he remained till he was twenty, a man with full power to act, subject only to my father's authority and that of the Central Government in Teherán. In 1890 he was sent to Yezd, as my father's representative in that city. And now, after seven years of successful rule at Yezd, he has been recalled by my uncle, the Sháh, and put in command of his Majesty's body-guard. *Oui, monsieur, mon frère aîné commande à quelques cavaliers à l'âge de vingt-huit ans : Masha'lláh ! c'est le comble de distinction, ça, parole d'honneur !*"

The first time I saw the Jalálu'd-Dawla was at the reading of my monthly report in the month of August, 1897. At my suggestion this little function, which was held in the flowery courtyard of the Díván-Kháné, had been made the occasion of some show and ceremony, the Zillu's-Sultán himself presiding, and his chief ministers and officers being present. When my pupils and I arrived at the meeting-place, we were received by Dr. Mírzá Huseyn Khán, who introduced me to his companion, the Jalálu'd-Dawla, in whose good-humoured, handsome, albeit fleshy, face there shone an expression of ineffable complacency, despite his recent fall from the ranks of the Powers that be. The sun was not more radiant than his countenance : his smiles were

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the rays of the spirit of his self-content—it was as though his inmost heart were singing praises to his body, sleek and well-loving, saying, “Oh thou, my sole complacence!” But this imperial self-esteem of his is far from being offensive. It is unaffected, irresistible, sunny, the primary expression of the man, the gift of Nature herself, and not the result of habits or the effect of culture: indeed, the violet is not more unconscious of its fragrance than the Jalálu’d-Dawla of his predominant charm. In the course of conversation, while we were awaiting the Prince’s arrival, he asked me how it came that scarce an Englishman in the country had taken the trouble to learn Persian thoroughly, whereas several Germans, as he knew, were excellent Oriental scholars; and I, who was reading Madame Dieulafoy’s book on Persia at that time, retorted by asking him what evil my country had wrought that he, so long a ruler in that part of Persia which might be said to lie within the sphere of the British influence, should have the reputation of being bitterly Anglophobe. The question, taking him by surprise, met with a reply *à la Kájár*, at once humorous and inconsequent—

“Who told you that, Sáhib?” he cried in French. “Why, I assure you, Sáhib, I have the warmest feelings of friendship for Dr. Carr, of the C.M.S.”

Then was British influence in Central Persia glorified.

I was still smiling all over my face, and so was

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the Jalál, when his Highness the Zillu's-Sultán, entering the sunny court-yard through the curtained doorway of the harem, walked impassively through the line of salaaming courtiers, and sat down on one of the chairs on the dais. To Dr. Mírzá Huseyn Khán, the Jalálu'd-Dawla, Père Pascal of the Roman Catholic Mission, and myself was granted the privilege of sitting down in the presence of the senior brother of the King of kings. My pupils remained standing in a semi-circle on the left of the fountain, the same position being assumed by the rest of the assembly in the compound below. The Aghá-Báshí and his tribe of ebony assistants were gathered round the sacred portals of the imperial harem. I saluted him from afar, whereat his big, flabby, inert-looking face put on an unwonted expression of gratified animation. It was a pathetic sight—enough to melt the heart of omnipotence itself.

When I had read aloud the report, and made a speech in French, which was put into Persian by Dr. Mírzá Huseyn Khán, the Zillu's-Sultán showed his appreciation of the progress his sons had made in their studies by bestowing upon each one of them a present of ten *túmdáns* (£2) in gold and an audible kiss on the mouth. Nor did his paternal pride content itself with this purely personal show of feeling. Bear with me yet a little longer, while I tell you of the sacrifice which he exacted from his humble servants. Singling out Bahrám Mírzá as the top of the class, he sent him round to be kissed on the

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mouth by the miserable mortals who happened to be seated. While the act of osculation was being performed by Dr. Mírzá Huseyn Khán, I breathed a terrified whisper in the ear of the Jalál, who sat next to me.

“Altesse,” I said under the breath, “you don’t mean to say I shall have to kiss the lad on the mouth?”

The Jalálu’d-Dawla, bursting out laughing, shared the humour of the situation with the Zillu’s-Sultán, who made me a mock ceremonious *seldám*, and cried, “Bismi’lláhi’r-Rahmáni’r-Rahím!” in a voice toned to the words, “Kiss him . . . and be thankful!”

But I protested, both hands up, against this breach in the customs of my country. In vain. His Highness was inexorable. Driven to desperation, I was about to plead a cold in the head and call Dr. Mírzá Khán to witness that the malady was contagious, when, remembering that I had an appointment at sunset, I wavered between to be and not to be, Bahrám Mírzá holding up his face to mine.

The Zillu’s-Sultán cried out again, “In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Forgiving! . . .”

“Il l’embrassera . . . il ne l’embrassera pas . . . il l’embrasse,” murmured the doctor.

If I was to be in time for the appointment at sundown, there was nothing for it but to bend my head. As I was sinking into the arms of Fate, I found it in my heart to envy even the Aghá-Báshí in the safety of his retreat. But I yielded reluctantly

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to the custom of the country, giving Bahrám Mírzá a sudden peck on the brow. Then was the Zill's paternal heart made glad.

“I think, *Şahib*,” said the Jalálu'd-Dawla, laughing, “that the ceremony should be repeated every month.”

“Anything you like, mon prince,” I replied, “except the kissing.”

I had scarce said the words when Humáyún Mírzá, tired of being inactive, burst from the ranks and seized me impulsively by the hands.

“*Mosie, mon ami !*” he cried, in an ecstasy of high spirits, “*fette moi faire de gymnastique devant son Altesse ; si non, mon force il vâ ! Oui, mosie mon maître, fette-moi faire petit soldat devant son Altesse ! Tête de son Altesse, mosie, fette-moi courir contre mes frères !*”

The request being interpreted to the Zillu's-Sultán, he was sore put to it to forego the pleasure of witnessing the athletic sports, but he made the sacrifice demanded by the gravity of the occasion, holding that the contest should be a contest of intellect, and not one of animal spirits. Then he turned to his eldest son, the Jalálu'd-Dawla, whose favourite half-brother and inseparable companion was present, and laid him odds that my pupil, Bahrám Mírzá, was a better French scholar than this same favourite brother of the Jalál's. The test was to be a piece of French dictation from a daily paper. The Jalálu'd-Dawla accepted the challenge in the

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name of his brother, Homús Mírzá, who was a frank, gentlemanly boy of fifteen, and hence two years older than his competitor, Bahrám Mírzá. Carpets being spread, the two boys squatted on their heels, and fell to writing at a table one foot above the ground. The dictation over, I took the exercises. While I was underlining the errors, the Zill, uttering the customary interjection of “Pa-pa-pa-pa-pa!” cried out—

“ Ma-sha’lláh ! how quickly he does it !”

“ He is not writing down the corrections, though,” said the doctor, who was jealous of every word of praise that fell from his master’s lips, if it did not apply to himself.

“ Am I being examined, or the boys ?” I retorted, ere I resumed my work.

The examination ended in another triumph for Bahrám, who made six errors, while his brother was guilty of making twice that number. The winner’s reward was fifteen *túmóns* in gold and a string of kisses on the mouth. The loser’s punishment was a flow of unpublishable abuse fresh from the paternal lips. The quick transition indicated the Zill’s reputation of being the most humorous Prince in Islam. There is a kingdom elsewhere, the realm of humour, and there, if not in Persia, the Zillu’s-Sultán reigns supreme. He had crowned himself that afternoon with his own particular crown, and, when he rose in all the majesty of his unconscious sovereignty, and walked





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away, I almost fancied I could hear the tinkling of the bells. My heart went out to Homús Mírzá in his undeserved humiliation.

“Can’t you hear them too?” I said to him.

“Hear what, Sáhib?” he asked, his face wearing a whimpered smile.

“The bells, my boy,” I replied.

“There are no bells in Persia, Sáhib.”

“I wasn’t thinking of church-bells, Homús Mírzá.”

“I beg pardon, Sáhib. . . . Perhaps it was the passing of a caravan of asses, bearing the ice. . . .”

I haven’t a doubt that he is still wondering why on earth I laughed.

“Not unlikely, my boy. . . . The leader wears the bell, doesn’t he?”

The poor lad flushed all over his face. “The Sáhib’s making fun of me,” said he.

“Making fun of you!” I cried. “Not a bit of it, my boy. I was smiling at your misapprehension of the joke. Come and have a chat with me this evening, and we’ll go scorpion-hunting together.”

All the lad needed to look the picture of an English public school boy was an Eton jacket and a big, white, turned-down collar. I was sorry he was not one of my pupils. His tutor had been a certain Persian *mírzá* whose English and French were utterly unintelligible to the more ordinary scholars of this planet. It was not wonderful that Homús Mírzá had suffered defeat. We were excellent

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friends, the lad and I, so long as he was at his father's Court, and when he set off with his brother to Teherán, he took with him the eager frankness which had rendered his visits an almost daily blessing. Among the Jalálu'd-Dawla's good works, this of the upbringing of his brother won the first place in my regard. I have often wondered why it was his Highness came to see me in all pomp and ceremony a few days after the meeting in the garden of the Díván-Kháné. Was it really to bid me farewell ere he went to Teherán to take over the command of the Sháh's body-guard? or was it not rather to satisfy the Zill's curiosity as to the aspect presented by my household gods, which I knew to be crude, and which the Zill knew to be costly? I cannot say for certain. All I know is that he began by asking me if I were truly comfortable, and ended by saying good-bye. His staff of retainers, as I took precious care, did not stay long in the room. Ours was a *tête-à-tête*, thank the Powers. Of our conversation I can recall nothing more memorable, and certainly nothing more characteristic of the Kájár's inquisitiveness, than his unblushing questions as to my private means and his lively concern as to my future prospects in England. His visit, in short, would deserve to be unchronicled had it not been followed by another from no less a magnate than Dr. Mírzá Huseyn Khán. But a ceremonious call from a man who bears the enviable reputation of knowing everything and of doing nothing, merits a place all to itself.

## CHAPTER VI

### A PERSIAN VIRTUOSO

TIME was when the Persians were trained to keep their tongues from lying and to draw the bow. To this day they love truth in the abstract, and are strenuous in search of it, but they draw the long bow in speech only. This habit of glib prevarication is nowhere more notorious than in the Court circle of the Zillu's-Sultán. It is not so much the expression of a deceitful heart, as it is the adventurous scout of a whole army of suspicions on the *qui vive*: the spirits of envy and jealousy being the special characteristics of courtiers all the world over. Now, the Persians, less manly than the Turks, but not so servile as the Armenians, are by nature the courtiers of the world: suave yet subtle, stooping to conquer, but not cringing to ingratiate. I would compare them in that regard to the gentlemen about the Court of Louis XIV.—with this saving difference, that, in all such qualities as prepossess, they have the advantage of half an hour's start over their former rivals in Europe.

## Persian Children of the Royal Family

This charm of manner comes of an untutored grace inherited from a long line of courtly gentlemen. I have known it to render a European somewhat ill at ease in the presence of his servants : a signal example of family pride yielding precedence to the pride of race. In the unofficial Persian it is a sincere expression of the national trend of character, and can fling grace over a muleteer ; in the professional courtier it is too often assumed as a cloak for deceit and treachery.

Dr. Mírzá Huseyn Khán, who now entered my room, is beyond all question a loyal servant of the Zillu's-Sultán. In all probability he is the sole courtier in Persia who can truthfully say that he never puts money in his purse by the wholesale and illicit extortion of *mudakhil*—a word meaning all that can be acquired by picking and stealing and by accepting bribes. For this, the cherished institution of his country, he has the most unbounded contempt. In this respect he stands alone. Even the Sháh has his *mudakhil*, all official posts conferred by him having their equivalent price, which goes into his private exchequer. The provincial governor, in his turn, who has purchased his post for a small fortune, indemnifies himself by farming out the taxes and customs to a third individual for a sum half as much again, perhaps, as he himself has given. The balance is his *mudakhil*. In like manner, the kalantar, in the next descending grade, exacts his perquisites from his underlings, the



A group of women gathered around a woman lying on a stretcher.



## A Persian Virtuoso

system being carried out until, at the bottom of the scale, the hungry peasant is left with nothing between him and starvation save the desert soil. The unholy institution works in precisely the same manner in the army. There the generals wring their *mudakhil* from the colonels and majors, who pounce upon the captains and lieutenants and give them a squeeze; and these, not less resourceful than their seniors, retaliate upon the non-commissioned officers and the rank-and-file, by selling to them the privilege of furlough or the right to work as artisans in the bazaars. It is, therefore, greatly to Dr. Mírzá Huseyn Khán's credit that he, who has so many opportunities of trading upon this custom, is anything but a wealthy man. But his aim is not to acquire riches. What he covets is influence. Provided he has the Prince's ear, he cares not a button as to who may dip the fingers in the imperial purse. The day is long past since the Zill was wont to humiliate the doctor by asking him to clean the imperial nails before the whole Court and his European guests. Nothing could be more assured in Persia than is the confidence the doctor enjoys now. His leading fault, unworthy of so intellectual a man, is mistrust. For the rest, he wore white socks, a Persian frock-coat of grey linen, a fez of black felt, and a European collar and tie. He has an intellectual forehead, a sensual mouth under a thick black moustache, and a figure short, chubby, and rotund. His voice, of a singularly pleasing quality, is two-fifths that of a man of

## Persian Children of the Royal Family

the world, and three-fifths that of a courtier. You will be pleased to picture him to yourself as sitting in my vaulted drawing-room on the armchair upholstered with tin-tacks and ticken, exuding courtliness and patchouli in equal measure from every pore.

"So his Highness, the Jalálu'd-Dawla, has just paid you a ceremonious visit, dear friend?" said he.

"He certainly came in full fig, doctor, accompanied by I don't know how many retainers. I lost count at thirty."

"A compliment to you, dear friend. . . . By-the-by, have you . . . missed anything . . . since they left?"

I rose frankly to the insinuation. "Not a single *ashab*, doctor," I replied.

"Yours is a lucky star, dear friend."

"You know the proverb: 'Once bitten, twice shy.'"

"Ah! . . . It has happened to you, then?"

"Not more than once, doctor."

A retrospective shadow crossed the doctor's face. "Our visits at Naw-Rúz [New Year's Day, the advent of spring]," he said sadly, "those we receive, I mean, are enough to break a virtuoso's heart."

"A regular spring-cleaning," I interpolated.

"And that with a vengeance, dear friend! . . . I am wondering how in the world you managed to escape to-day the penalty which is the usual result of receiving an imperial guest? . . . Is it a secret?"

## A Persian Virtuoso

" You shall share it and welcome, doctor. . . . I took the precaution of craving his Highness to grant me the favour of a private interview. . . . He was good enough to comply with my request, and dismissed his nimble-fingered staff."

The doctor's eyes opened wide with amazement  
Then he heaved a sigh.

" Ah, well, dear friend," he said at last, " I envy you. It is certainly a privilege to be a European if one is about the Court of a Persian Prince of the Blood . . . especially if one happens to be a curio-hunter."

There was a pause. I was the first to break the silence, and with it a golden rule.

" By-the-by, doctor, I am thinking of cultivating a hobby whilst I am in Persia, a pursuit that would fill my leisure hours here and be of practical use to me on my return home. There is nothing that I should like better than to make myself an authority on something characteristically Persian. To that end I shall ask you to do me a favour. . . ." Bang!—crash! . . . The golden rule was broken.

" An excellent notion, dear friend. . . . Delighted to help you in any way I can. . . . But my range is limited. . . . Have you made your choice ?"

" Yes ; if practicable, I have. What attracts me most is Persian art. Will you lend me your help in the matter, doctor ?"

" Persian art ? A pretty wide term, isn't it ? Wouldn't it be possible to specialize ?"

## Persian Children of the Royal Family

“Certainly ; that was my intention, and is still my hope. I will narrow down my requirements a little. Can you put me in the way of studying Persian illuminated work—freehand drawings in colour, paintings in still life, and so forth ? I saw many admirable examples of that kind of work in Teherán. To my unaccustomed eye they seemed to be perfect, anyhow. Of course they might have been spurious—faked.”

Dr. Mírzá Huseyn Khán almost jumped out of his skin.

“Why, that’s my field ! ” he cried.

“So much the better for me,” I replied innocently. “It will be all the easier for you to guard me against imposition and extortion. In our case, doctor, there’s no reason why two of a trade should not agree.”

“Frankly speaking, dear friend, I must entreat you to pursue another and a different hobby. I am in the way of being the authority on the Persian illuminated art work. My collection is fairly representative, and is the result of many years of patient toil. I had it in the mind at one time to write a book on the subject, that should be published in France. It would be a disappointment if you were to forestall me. Spare me the bitter reproach of my idleness. Choose another hobby ! ”

“Willingly,” I replied. “In return, put me in the way of writing an article on old Persian manuscripts.”

## A Persian Virtuoso

The doctor extended his arms as though he would embrace the whole wide field of art.

"They belong to the same department," he said, jealously. "I must ask you, dear friend, out of sympathy for me, to refrain from writing anything whatever about Persian art. I am a lazy man myself, but one of these days I shall set to work, perhaps. God knows! Meanwhile I would keep that special field open. It really belongs to me by right of the encouragement I extend to the single Persian artist living, who can challenge comparison with our Old Masters in the art of writing and illuminating the works of the Persian poets. His calligraphy and his illuminations are miracles of beauty, the perfection of art. He works for nobody but me. He comes to my house every day, and works there, under my eye and superintendence. I have the monopoly of his productions. He pursues his handiwork to my order alone. I am not an easy man to please, but I am satisfied with him. His manuscripts will be priceless one day. When he dies, his art will die with him. There is nobody to carry on the traditions of the Old School of Aká Ibráhim and Yákut."

"What you tell me, doctor, is vastly interesting," was my reply. "I will do something more than promise you to keep my pen from writing about Persian art. It would give me pleasure to find a publisher, if you would write the book in English."

"You are very good. But how could I? My English is too crude, too homely, not sufficiently

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literary. No, no ! The book, if I ever write it, must be worthy of the subject and what I know about it. It must be written in French."

"Nonsense, doctor. There are not many writers in England whose style is more winning than yours. False modesty is beneath you. I should like Old England to have the honour of publishing your book. It would be the standard work on a subject about which we know next to nothing. Then, on merely practical grounds, it would be better to publish the book in English. Ours is the language of the future. Consider the market you would secure in the United States alone, to say nothing of the Colonies and the Mother Country and India. I place myself unreservedly at your service. Make use of me in any way you like. I believe *The Studio* would publish a large-paper copy of the book as an extra summer number. Come, yield yourself to my enthusiasm. Go home at once, and begin. Start is all. Don't lose another day. Can't I persuade you to take time by the forelock ?"

"Your enthusiastic interest in a book that has yet to be written is exceedingly flattering to me. Thank you, dear friend. You almost persuade me to be as energetic as yourself. But my foster-mother tongue is not English. It is French. Possibly I can be of service in another direction. If so, I beg of you to open your heart."

I suggested carpet-weaving as being an interesting study.

## A Persian Virtuoso

"As for that," replied the doctor, "you would do better to consult Mr. Churchill, who was British Consul at Resht. His little book, too, is worth reading."

"Persian pottery, . . ." I murmured.

" . . . Is a subject about which I know less than nothing, dear friend," broke in the doctor, hastily enough. "I am inclined to believe Mr. Preece to be the best authority in the matter. You should have a chat with him on his return to the Consulate at Isfahán. I cannot say that I take the least interest in Persian pottery or in lustre ware. My advice to you is to consult Mr. Preece."

My answer was, "Your modesty is invincible, I fear."

"Say rather my ignorance, dear friend."

"For me to compliment a Doctor of Medicine of London and Paris would be ridiculous. You are far too modest."

Doctor Mírzá Huseyn Khán, flinging himself into the opening, fell back on his reminiscences.

"Yes," he said dreamily, "they are pleasant to reflect upon, those European days. I was little more than a lad when I was studying in Paris. Before completing my studies there, I crossed the Channel to London. In my absence the Franco-German War broke out. I had gone to London for the sake of a holiday; I stayed there to pursue my medical course. When I had taken my degree I returned to Paris, peace being restored at last. . . .

## Persian Children of the Royal Family

Poor France! . . . Half the glory of the queen of cities had departed. Having passed the *doctorat en médecine*, I went back to Persia, my father's affairs necessitating my return, and the Zillu's-Sultán took me into his service. . . . But I am stealing your time. . . . Au revoir, cher ami."

He rose to take his leave. I accompanied him to the compound gateway.

"Good-bye, dearest friend," said the doctor, reaching out for my hand. "Please to remember that it would give me the greatest pleasure to do for you all that might lie in my power. For instance, if you should ever wish to make a suggestion to his Highness, or to ventilate a grievance, my services as interpreter would always be at your disposal."

I bore the promise in mind. Some weeks later he invited me to dinner. Both of us took upon ourselves "the shame of wine"—as Jalálu'd-Dín Rúmí, the mystical poet, has it,—Dr. Mírzá Huscyn Khán so far escaping from himself as to discourse most eloquently on the forbidden subject of Persian art—a proof, among other things, of his confidence in my trustworthiness as an individual which made some small amends for his mistrust of me as a colleague (and therefore a rival) in the Prince's service. For several weeks past I had been not a little amused by the suspicions, cloaked, of course, in the customary courteousness, which my unaffectedly innocent deportment excited round about the Palace.

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On one occasion, I remember, Akbar Mírzá asked his father to tell him the time, his watch having stopped.

"You had better ask the Sáhib," replied the Zill; "he always knows the time of day in Isfahán, in Teherán, and in London: he receives so many telegrams, you see. The fact is, he is full of intelligence."

Did the Prince suspect me of being an Intelligence officer, I wonder? I believe he had formed some such erroneous impression from my month's stay in Teherán, where I fell ill of dysentery, and from my registering the agreement between us at the British Legation there. The opening of my letters was another link in the chain of my supposition, which was clinched by the obstacles thrown in the way of my witnessing the Shi'ah Passion-plays. All this, amusing as it was at first, had outgrown my sense of humour long ago, and, as I sat listening to the doctor's post-prandial eloquence, I resolved to clear the atmosphere so soon as I could get a word in edgewise. The clearing of my character from all suspicions might have been effected then and there, had it not been for the fact that the truth of a Latin proverb was slowly but steadily communicating itself to my mind. In other words, no sooner had the doctor unburdened himself of his art message, than the sleek insinuating wine within me, stealing away my caution, took the unpardonable liberty of revealing my literary plans.

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The treacherous afflatus of the juicy grape took me clean out of myself. The "beaded bubbles" betrayed me with a wink. The doctor (an agnostic, who would like to know) was about to discuss the topic of free-thought and faith, when the same insidious spirit within me whispered, "Now's your time; speak this instant, or for ever hold your tongue!"

"By-the-by, doctor," I said, "you will excuse my interrupting you, but I should like to say a few words on a purely personal matter before we adventure ourselves upon the unknown sea of speculative philosophy."

Of course he pricked both ears at once. Then I made a clean breast of my modest ambitions. The scheme I had in the mind was, I think, a praiseworthy one. What I wished to do was to write a series of articles on the Province of Isfahán, with the Zillu's-Sultán as the central figure holding the stage, for publication in the columns of the *Morning Post*. I pledged my word that I would make the Zill the best-loved Prince in Islám. I swore by all the gods that he should reign in the hearts of the British people. I called upon all the hosts of heaven to help me that I might rise to the height of my argument. Nor did I stop there. I went so far as to misquote Shakespeare. "Doctor," cried the wine-spirit in my brain, "I have a prince to act, and monarchs shall behold the swelling scene! Now shall the warrior Zill assume the port of Mars; and

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at his heels, leashed in like hounds, shall Famine, Sword, and Fire crouch for employment." My enthusiasm grew. I poured into the doctor's ears the advantages to the Zillu's-Sultán of the undertaking I had at heart. But long before I ever saw the Persian sun, it had grown, that enthusiasm of mine, on the trellised vineyards of Shiráz! When I rose at last to say "good night," the doctor said to me—

" Well, dear friend, how much of our conversation should you like me to tell his Highness? I will tell him as much or as little as you like. Must I regard your little plan as a confidence?"

Heaven above, what a question! Hadn't I been positively labouring with anxiety to prove to the Zill that I wasn't an Intelligence officer?

" Tell him every single word of it, doctor," I replied, and returned home, chuckling all the way.

" That's all right, thank the Powers!" I said to myself, ere I lay me down under the daffodil stars. " They'll never believe you to be an Intelligence officer after to-night. Never did an Intelligence officer act as you acted since lambkins first were fleecy. Your concealment of the essential quality was masterly." And having bid good-night to the winy god, I hugged myself in the assurance of the peaceful days ahead, then fell asleep. But when I went about my duties next morning, it was to discover that I had stemmed one source of suspicion

## Persian Children of the Royal Family

only to set another a-bubbling under my feet. I had gone to bed in the belief of being considered an Intelligence officer. I awoke to find myself distrusted as a journalistic spy. An imperial veto was put forthwith on the writing of articles. Dr. Mírzá Huseyn Khán assured me of the fact. He was good enough to hope I wasn't disappointed. My belief is, now, that the plan was withheld from the Prince as being only too likely to redound to my favour in his sight by tickling his sense of vanity : indeed, before I left Persia, his sons told me that such was the fact. However, I accepted the doctor's assurance in all good faith, and acquiesced in the official decision. The following week my newspapers were opened. It would delight my heart to have Dr. M. H. Khán's verdict as to the literary qualities of the *Wrexham Advertiser*, which was the one paper that came to my hand regularly. Many months later, long after I had regained my prestige, and had reached Teherán on my homeward journey, I went one evening to smoke a pipe with the greatest living authority on Persia. In the course of conversation, my genial host turned to me all animation, and said—

“ Well, and now tell me how you and Dr. Mírzá Huseyn Khán hit it off together. Did you like him ? ”

“ General,” I replied, smiling, “ ‘ he showed me their shaping, theirs who most studied man, the bard and sage,—learned, I found him.’ ”

“ Very neat. That was Browning, I think. But



SCENES IN A FILM BY THE STAFF OF U.S. NAVY REED



## A Persian Virtuoso

how's the little doctor getting on with that big book of his?"

My heart gave a leap: oh doctor—doctor!  
"What big book, general?" I asked.

"On Persian art in all its branches: old manuscripts, pottery, lustreware, carpet-weaving and *tout le tremblement*. It will be stupendous, my friend. He has been working at it for six years, I believe. It's to be published in Paris—illustrations galore and as large as life. Will it pay? No; I don't think it will. Of course you know all about the book of the next century?"

Then I took the general into my confidence, telling him briefly what I have written down here in full.

"Delicious—isn't it, general?" I ended by saying.

"I recognize the portrait, Tutor Sáhib."

"By Jove, general, I'll have him on toast yet. *Attendons la fin.*" But I think the doctor scarcely deserves the compliment I have paid him in giving his hobby a memory, and his literary bantling a "puff."

## CHAPTER VII

### A VICTIM OF THE HAREM AMONG THE RUINS

UNDER every conceivable circumstance it behoves the Sháh of Persia, whose least grandiloquent title is that of the King of kings, to affect a demeanour in public which shall rival that of the Sphinx in impassiveness. This assumption of aloofness from the emotions of the flesh and the spirit reached the zenith of achievement in the bearing of the late Sháh, Násiru'd-Dín. While he accepted the adulation of his subjects with the mien of a marble god, he granted to them the fullest freedom of speech. "Let them talk!" he said on one occasion, in the very words of the Prussian king. "They say what they like, and I do what I like." And if it sometimes happened that Násiru'd-Dín Sháh missed the hour when great Jove awoke, you may be sure that his face gave no token of the blunder he had made. He had learned the traditional bearing in his youth, and age was powerless to stale its ineffable composure.

The son, however, who now reigns in his stead,

## A Victim of the Harem

was less fortunate in his destiny ; he had to acquire the sovereign style when his face was worn with the agony of his long self-effacement in Azerbiján, and, if he now bears himself, as he does, with the unimpassioned aloofness of a Sháh, it has been at the cost of an all but superhuman effort of the will. His thoroughbred face, pure Jewish in its lineaments, as are the faces of so many Persians, is careworn, but calm, unconscious of its pathos, and hence it makes a touching appeal to such among us as have eyes to see and hearts to understand.

A very different aspect is that of his elder brother, the *Zillu's-Sultán*, whose face alters so completely with the momentary expression it wears as to appear sometimes as that of another man. A rough-hewn, bony, expressive face is his, covered all over with adipose tissue, like that of Martin Luther. The mirror of his mood, it can knit itself in a frown and put on a vindictive look ; just as readily it can kindle with compassion and win over an enemy with a smile. Lean, the face had been aggressively vigorous ; but being, as it is, undeniably fleshy, its vigour is rounded with an expression of good-humour more or less habitual. Perhaps the face wears its most attractive appearance when it is turned upon his children, whom he calls “the light of his eyes.” For it is then that his whole face breaks out and expands in a smile of benign affection, infinitely lovable in so masterful a man. So devoted was he to his favourite daughter, the sister of Akbar Mírzá,

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that he could not bear her to be out of his sight ; accordingly she was requested to dress herself in male attire, that she might accompany him withersoever he went ; and this she did until she was ten years old, when the harem claimed her budding womanhood as its own. A photograph—a charming souvenir of those tomboy days of hers—was given to me on the eve of my leaving Persia, and lies on my writing-desk at the present moment. The Zillu's-Sultán, in military uniform, is sitting in a broad chair, which he fills with his amazing bulk. His right arm is thrown round his little daughter, who is nestling at his side in the uniform of a Persian general. Her hair is cut short ; on her head she wears a tall hat of white astrakhan, and an expression half-thoughtful, half-wilful on her chubby face. A half-brother of hers, in a similar uniform, stands between his father's knees, looking for all the world like a little *mulla* in disguise. He has since fulfilled his obvious destiny, and now wears the priestly '*abá*'.

The Zillu's-Sultán has many daughters ; but this winsome maiden is the queen of his heart, the tyrant whose will it were humiliating to oppose, so irresistible is said to be the smile she holds in reserve for the foolhardy ! In like manner my pupils have many sisters, but this darling playmate of theirs is the only one that counts. I know not which of them loved her the most. Akbar Mírzá, born, as he was, of the same mother, spoke of her as “my sister,” but he took precious care not to put a stress



THE ZILLU'S-SULTÁN, HIS FAVOURITE DAUGHTER IN BOY'S CLOTHES,  
AND A SON WHO IS NOW A PRIEST.



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upon his proprietary claim if Humáyún Mírzá happened to be within earshot. “*Elle est notre sœur !*” the wild little Kurd boy exclaimed one day. “*Et j'aime elle aussi que vous ne sais pas—oui !*” And as “*notre sœur*” it is that I always think of her. She is now seventeen years old, and is still the light of her father’s harem, and the apple of his eye. I don’t think he could ever bring himself to part with her. According to Humáyún Mírzá, no Persian living is worthy to call her wife. He expressed his conviction with his customary vehemence. “*Mosie mon ami,*” he cried, “*les hommes en Perse, ils sont trop—— ! et notre sœur, elle est très—— !*” I did not ask him to cudgel his brain for the missing words : his gestures were more than enough to lay bare his unutterable contempt on the one hand and his breathless adoration on the other. Discretion forbids me to pursue the story of “*notre sœur*” in the cloistered life of her father’s harem. It will be enough to say that, although I never saw the light of her countenance, she was, all unconsciously perhaps, my most useful ally in the upbringing of her brothers, who feared nothing so much as a word of reproof from her. Her influence over them was boundless, and made for manliness and manners ; and herein alone we have ample warrant that the Prince her father’s known affection for her is well-deserved. Her companion in the photograph (I have forgotten his name, unfortunately) was not one of my pupils. He was studying theology long before I arrived. All

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the time I was in Persia I only saw him once, and when that happened he was talking to his father in the court-yard, and I was standing at the class-room window above. His thoughtful cast of countenance was in keeping with the spotless *'abá* and the white turban he wore. Humáyún Mírzá was buzzing in my ear, as usual.

“C'est le petit *mullá*; il est notre frère,” said he.

“How would you like to be a priest?” I asked.

“Me!” yelled Humáyún Mírzá.

“Why not?”

“I'm a man!”

“Not yet.”

“That's true, mosie mon ami. But I shall be a man when I am older, whereas he will always be a priest.”

“It's a subtle distinction, young man. To which sex do priests belong, then?”

“That is difficult, mosie.”

“Come—are they men?”

“I ask pardon of God!” cried Humáyún Mírzá. His tone was an emphatic denial of the virility of priests.

“Women, perhaps?”

He pondered the question with unaccustomed deliberation.

“Plutôt ça” (“That's more like it”), he replied, “and yet not quite. They are not men, they are not women, they are——” He paused again, deliberating.

## A Victim of the Harem

“Your hesitation, Humáyún, would be a positive torture to the little priest in the court-yard, if he knew his manhood was being called in question.”

The little Kurd’s face grew suddenly bright. “I have it!” he cried. “They are neuter!”

And with this decision of Humáyún’s on the vexed question of the priests’ sex, I will ring up the curtain upon one of the most eventful days in my life at the Zillu’s-Sultán’s court, asking the reader to remember that the young princes have grown almost a year older since their last appearance in Chapter V.

When I entered the school-room, which had been removed to the Palace of Forty Pillars, once the judgment-hall of the great Sháh ’Abbás, my imperial pupils, less imperious and undisciplined than of yore, leaped from their seats at the round marble tables, and stood at attention.

“Good morning, sir,” they said in chorus.

“Good morning, boys,” I replied. “Sit down.”

Sinking to their chairs, they waited until I spoke again.

“This morning,” I continued, laying down my whip and sun-helmet, “we shall do no work, because——”

The prospect of a holiday took them by surprise, and, before I had time to say another word, Humáyún Mírzá, whose boisterous moods, as you will remember, were always wont to suffer a sea-change of remorse, leaped to his feet, gave a cheer, clapped his hands, tossed aside his books, and cut a caper round the

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room ; then, doffing his *kulâh*, as a token of the love he bore his Firangí tutor, he laid hold of my whip and gave it a clack, swearing by his father's life that I should be his Prime Minister when he, Humáyún Mírzá, should be King of Kurdistán ; after which, his excitement relaxing under the tutorial eye, he resumed his seat and begged pardon.

“It is incredible,” he said in French, his vivid face all beams, “how rude I am !”

“Hand over the whip, you young Turk !” I cried.

“Très bien, mais vous ne me rosserez pas, mosie ?” (“but you won't thrash me ?”).

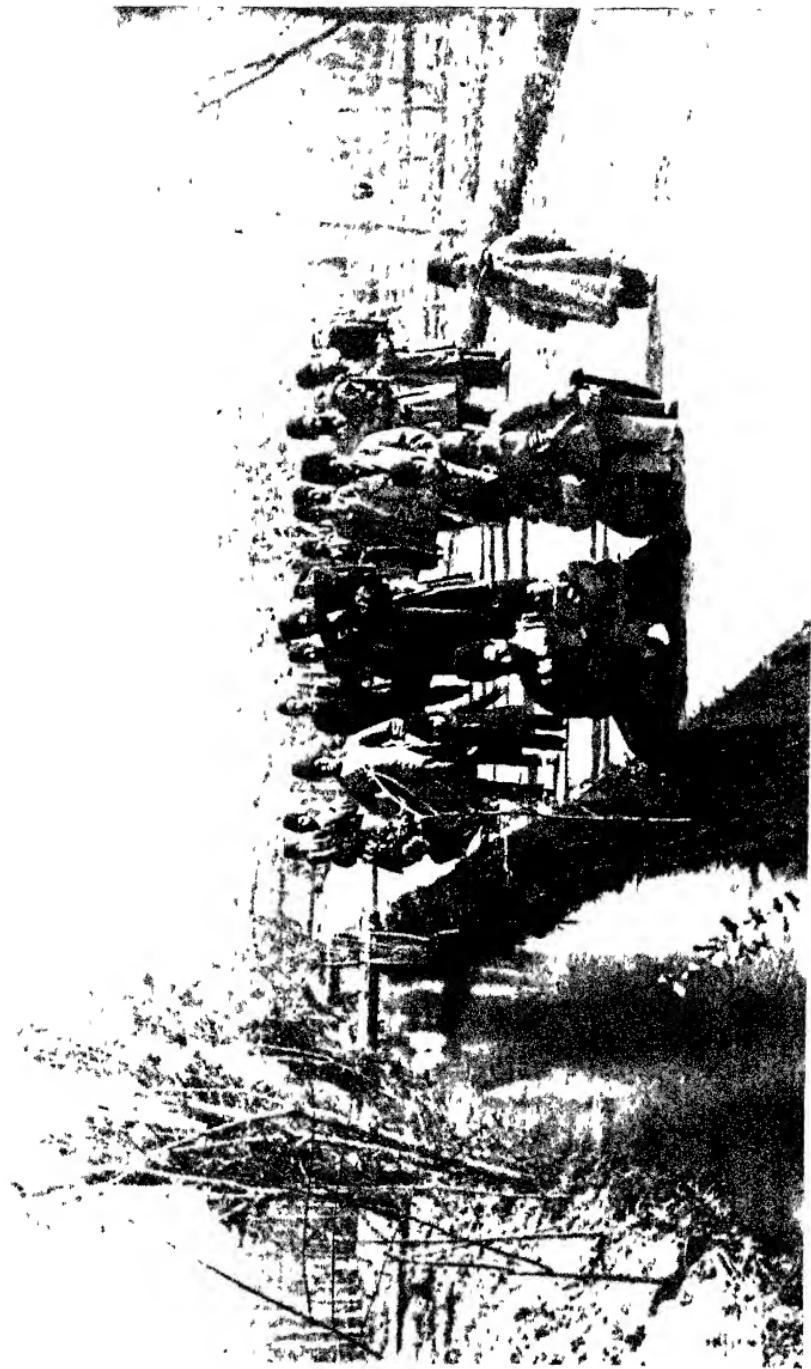
“Certainly not. Why should I ?”

“Très bien. Wah-wah-wah-wah ! how that whip hurt me yesterday ! I can feel it still, mosie mon ami ; it is astonishing how it hurts ! Wah-wah-wah-wah !”

“Then I should recommend the perpendicular as being less excruciating. Stand up ! . . . What I was going to propose when Humáyún Mírzá interrupted me was that you should escort me to the Tálár Távilé. That is all. What do you say ?—shall we go ?”

Bahrám Mírzá, a ruler in little, said nothing : he rather fixed his unfathomable eyes upon my face, and smiled a grave, slow smile. I was destined to appreciate the full significance of his smile later on.

Humáyún Mírzá's gratitude was expressed more



THE GARDEN OF CHIEN-SU, CHIN ("FORTY PILLARS") IN WINTER; THE ZILLU'S-SULTAN'S SONS WITH THEIR "NURSES."



## A Victim of the Harem

frankly ; his droll French vanquished the tutor in the man.

“*J'aime vous,*” he declared for the hundredth time that week, “*que vous ne sais pas—oui !*” Then correcting himself, “*Si vous saviez comme je vous aime, monsieur mon ami !*”

This whole-hearted expression of good-will was infectious : a twinkling smile danced in Bahrám's eyes, and Akbar Mírzá, tilting back his *kuláh*, as a declaration of independence, burst into a hearty laugh. As for Ferídún Mírzá, he was quick to seize the occasion as his own by right of his sole gift as a story-teller. Flinging himself back into the past with a dash that took many a fact at a bound, he depicted the pristine splendour of the historic spot, Bahrám Mírzá only opening his lips in order to confirm or to deny the truth of the graphic description.

The story, as told by Ferídún Mírzá, Prince Fortunate, was a revelation to his tutor of a character till then unappreciated. I earmarked the unsuspected trait in my memory as a means whereby a dull hour or so might be whiled away in the future. The effect upon Humáyún Mírzá was very different. His brother's eloquence chafed his restless spirit as the wind chafes the sea. He protested in every limb of him his eagerness to be out-of-doors. Yet the description had been full of life and colour : the little Kurd himself was not more animated. The Tálár Távillé, or Stable Hall, of the Isfahán palace,

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stripped of Ferídún's flowers of speech, was a fairy-like structure in the reign of Sháh 'Abbás the Great. It was an abode where some Persian jinn and his court might seek shelter on starry nights, and scarce regret the shadowy seclusion of their airy fairyland. Venetian crystals of every colour of the rainbow formed the sashes dividing it into three compartments. The groined ceiling, richly wrought in coloured-glass mosaic, was supported on wooden pillars as graceful as flower-stems, all adorned in purple and in yellow. Tapestries of unimaginable beauty covered the walls. Water rose in a spray from many fountains, and fell with a splash into a tank of snowy marble that filled the central compartment of this Crystal Palace. There it was that Solimán Sháh, the successor of 'Abbás the Less, was crowned the Asylum of the Universe; and thither, through the shady compound of chenar-trees, the representatives of the foreign Powers were wont to wend their way to the ambassadorial audiences. On those gala occasions the garden was tricked out in a fashion calculated to dazzle the visitors with the wealth and splendour of the Persian court. Fountains innumerable cast their liquid diamonds to the flashing sky. Water rippled through channels hewn out of porphyry. Flowers of the brightest colours yielded their sweets to the fierce hornets and humming bees. The best blood of the imperial stud was led out in harness, all ablaze with precious stones, and hobbled hard by the mangers surrounding the gardens with

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chains of massive gold. The paths were crowded with courtiers, grave and reverend ; they were there to do homage to the Firangís whom the King of kings delighted to honour.

“ Such, monsieur,” said Ferídún Mírzá, pausing to take breath, “ was the appearance of the Tálár Távillé in the days when the pomp and magnificence of the Court of Sháh ’Abbás the Great were the envy and admiration of every country in the East.”

“ And the West too,” said Akbar the Magnificent.

“ And now ? ” I asked.

Bahrám Mírzá smiled his grave, slow smile. “ Nous avons changé tout cela, nous autres,” he replied ; then his dark unfathomable eyes took on an abstracted look. Akbar Mírzá darted a quick glance upon him.

“ We princes are rich enough, anyhow,” he retorted.

Once more the grave, slow smile flickered over Bahrám’s face, then went out like a light.

“ Are we rich enough to defend ourselves against the Russians ? ” he asked.

“ England will help us—won’t she, Sáhib ? ” was Akbar’s reply.

“ Did England help us against the Afghans, who laid Isfahán in ruins ? Would it not be wise to learn to help ourselves ? ”

“ That God may help us—yes,” Ferídún Mírzá added.

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“ You should be a *mullâ*, mon frère,” said the incorrigible Kurd. “ Come along, mosie, let us go. Vite. Si non, mon force il vâ ! Je veux dire, monsieur, que je serai à bout de mes forces ; je deviendrai faible comme une femme.”

“ Bahrám’s questions,” I replied, gripping the little youngster by both his arms, “ should teach you to husband your strength. Off you go—begone.”

There was a rush for the door. Humáyún was the first to get his shoes on. “ Vous ne sais pâs me prendre, Sâhib ! ” he cried, and was gone, his servants panting in the rear. A wild colt for speed and aimless activity, he ran hither and thither, neighing, crowing, shouting, laughing. The tutor, following at his ease, went off in a day-dream. His aim was to teach the Persians to be themselves, by inculcating in the children of the House of Kájár the principles of a go-ahead patriotism. Though his reach might exceed his grasp, he would still pin his faith in the success of the undertaking, because the material was good, awaiting the hand that should shape it aright. Bahrám Mírzá promised to be the ablest Kájár that ever lived. He was a ruler in little, a politician in the germ. Humáyún Mírzá, it must be confessed, needed discipline ; but his dash and go and unconquerable spirit were the stuff whereof soldiers are made. The tutor found it more difficult to place Ferídún Mírzá. Pensive, courteous, gentlemanly, he lacked gall to make oppression bitter. But a striking characteristic was his : he possessed the tact

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and astuteness to conceal from his master, until pretty late in their acquaintanceship, the complete revelation of his nature. Such traits as might be considered "slim" in a man full-grown are not unattractive in a schoolboy, and with these, as they manifested themselves in Ferídún Mírzá, I shall deal in a subsequent chapter. In the meantime, it will suffice to say that he is in the main a chip of the old block as it shapes itself in his uncle the Sháh, both being sensitive, tender-hearted, and merciful beyond the ordinary, and of a temper essentially thoughtful, thoroughbred, and devout. As for Akbar Mírzá the Magnificent, he was a first-rate youngster at heart. Reduced to the ranks betimes, he proved, both in his truthfulness and in his ingenuous swagger, that he might yet be found fit (not that truth is in itself a qualification for high promotion in Persia) to cut a dash, and act a worthy part, as a provincial governor. Providence even then was busy shuffling the cards whereon the fate of Persia depended. How would these pupils of his play the hands dealt out to them? The tutor, wondering, awoke at Bahrám's voice, saying—

"Here is the Tálár Távillé, Sáhib."

My eyes opened wide with astonishment. "That!" I cried. "Surely that is the Aghá-Báshí's stable-yard? Why, I ride across it every day!"

"That was why I smiled just now," said Bahrám Mírzá. . . . What did I say?"

"Changed indeed," I said, casting a glance around.

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Of all the sights of Isfahán, this of the Tálár Távile, standing as it does, within the walls of the palace enclosure, might be said to be the most pathetic in the pitiless decay of its splendour. Over all there hangs the shadow of lost causes and unabashed misrule. The burning sun beats down on the arid compound with never an intervention. The noble chenar-trees, long fallen to the axe, serve as the material for carpentry nowadays. The water-channels are empty. The walls and mangers are crumbling to a fall. The pavilion itself recalls the mud huts of Kóhrúd. To make the decay worse confounded, there was life among the ruins. Half a dozen filly foals, let loose from the head eunuch's stables, kicked and gambolled in the sun. A lean hen, her every feather a-stare, chuckled to her brood in the dung. A pack of pariah dogs fought savagely over the almost bare carcase of a camel. A tame ibex took the channel at a leap, and nuzzled in Akbar's hand. Humáyún Mírzá, neighing in likeness of the filly foals, ran races with his shadow. Bahrám Mírzá knit a meditative brow, smiling his grave, slow smile. Ferídún Mírzá's pensive countenance, as I presently discerned, was fixed on an indistinguishable object crouching in the dust. I thought I had never seen a figure so lonely, so nerveless, so inanimate. Its back was turned upon us, the head sunk, as if lifeless, on the breast.

"Look, Sáhib," cried Ferídún Mírzá. "What is that?"



PRINCE AKBAR MIRZA AND TUTI PERSIAN 1844



## A Victim of the Harem

At the sound of the voice the figure rose, slowly and painfully to his feet, and faced about. Feeble, loosely knit, and in rags, the man, a black, stood within an inch or two of seven feet in height. I drew near : so pitiful a face I never saw. The cheeks were emaciated and devoid of hair. The eyes protruded, starting out of the sockets, but the sense in them was shut. The loose blubber lips babbled incoherently. I had certainly judged the man to be mad, but that there was never a mark of the beast in this sorry wreck of humanity. When a man in health loses his reason, the inhuman in the human being, the mere animal in him, is left. Such a one might be said to present a living picture of that revolting side of us which we strive to conceal even from ourselves. But in this pitiful specimen of mankind the human being and the animal alike were dead. Only the husk of him remained. How, then, could the poor unfortunate creature be called insane merely ? Bahram Mirza, still smiling his grave, slow smile, eked out the agony of the moment.

“That,” he said, in reply to Feridun’s question, “is the mad eunuch.”

Compassion touched the tutor to the core. Reaching out his hand, he patted the effete slave on the back.

“Poor old fellow ! ” he murmured ; “poor old fellow ! ”

The victim of the harem made no response.

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Standing amid the ruins of a glorious past, he was, mercifully, unconscious that the most pathetic wreck of all was himself—the symbol, as it were, of modern and moribund Persia.

Ferídún Mírzá, laying hold of my arm, drew me aside, begging me to take him away lest he should burst into tears.

“My boy,” I replied, “we should be spared such a sight as that, if every man in Persia would be content with one wife.”

“Que voulez-vous !” cried Akbar Mírzá, who had overheard Ferídún’s petition ; “en Perse, c’est comme ça. Isfahán, cependant, est la moitié du monde.”

Whereat Bahrám Mírzá smiled his grave, slow smile once more.

## CHAPTER VIII

### IN WHICH THE ZILL IS SHOWN TO BE WIDE-AWAKE

O PPOSITE to the garden of the Tálár Távillé are other houses and gardens, where had dwelt, in the glorious days of Sháh 'Abbás, the Imperial Guards of the 'Alí Kápi, or Sublime Porte, whither my pupils and I now directed our steps. These dwellings, one of which had been placed at my disposal on my arrival, are separated from the Tálár Távillé by a paved alley, between high walls, leading from the Sacred Gate to the Royal Palace within, and from the Royal Palace within, through the 'Alí Kápi, to the Meidán Sháh, or Royal Square without. The *táldr*, or hall above the Gate, faces the Meidán Sháh, is supported by twelve wooden columns, and contains a marble basin in the centre. It was there that Sháh 'Abbás the Great gave audience to the ambassadors at Naw-rúz (New Year's Day, the first day of spring), and there he sat to witness the horse-races and polo-matches, the wild-beast fights and public entertainments, in

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the Royal Square below. The threshold stone of white porphyry was five inches high and semi-circular, in the shape of an ass's back, and was situated either in the gateway or at the end of the paved alley leading thither. No one might cross this threshold with impunity ; even the king on horseback dismounted in token of respect ; everybody whom he delighted to honour went and kissed the stone ; and the precincts were held an inviolable sanctuary, from which none but the sovereign could oust a fugitive, and he by means of starvation alone. Hear what Tavernier said : "That day that the new King receives his Ensignia of Royalty, he goes to stride over that Stone, and if by negligence he should chance to touch it, there are four guards at the Gate that would make a show of thrusting him back again." Night and day the 'Alí Kápi was left open under the rule of the Safaví Sháhs, and that practice was kept up by the representatives of the Kájár dynasty until, after the assassination of the late Sháh Naṣiru'd-Dín, the Zillu's-Sultán, who has a morbid fear that he will meet with his father's fate, withheld his sanction to its being used as a thoroughfare, lest assassins should break through and put him to death ; but he still pays respect to the old-time sanctity of the spot by dismounting from his horse, and by granting *bast*, or sanctuary, to such evildoers as shall seek refuge under the iron chain at the back. Of this I was not aware until the incorrigible Kurd boy, Humáyún Mírzá, stealing

## The Zill is shown to be Wide-awake

behind me, snatched the whip from my grasp, and made a rush for the chain, vociferating his independence of all control, in the panting voice of one who had escaped the jaws of death by the skin of his teeth.

“I have *bast!*” he cried, sinking under the chain in a mock-swoon. “The Sáhib can’t touch me, nor can his Highness. I have *bast!* Of course the Sáhib, who is an infidel, might thrash me hence ; but I have his whip, thank Alláh ! Behold, I give it as an offering to ’Ali. I have *bast!* True, his Highness might starve me out ; but I have eaten, thank Alláh, and am full. A demain, mosie mon ami et mon cher maître !” The inimitable intonation of the last word was a courteous declaration of his independence. “Begone !” he cried, leaping to his feet, and clacking the whip about our ears. “My crimes are many, but I have *bast!* I would die in peace. Begone !” Humáyún Mírzá was the master of the situation.

Turning to Ferídún Mírzá, I expressed a desire to scale the stairs to the hall above, but he replied, saying—

“That is not possible, monsieur. The only men in Persia who are allowed to go upstairs are the Sháh, the Zillu’s-Sultán, and the eunuchs of their harems. I am sorry, monsieur, but that is the order at the Court.”

“You see, sir,” said Akbar Mírzá, “if you mounted, you could regard the gardens of the harem

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and the wives of his Highness, and that would be contrary to the custom of the country."

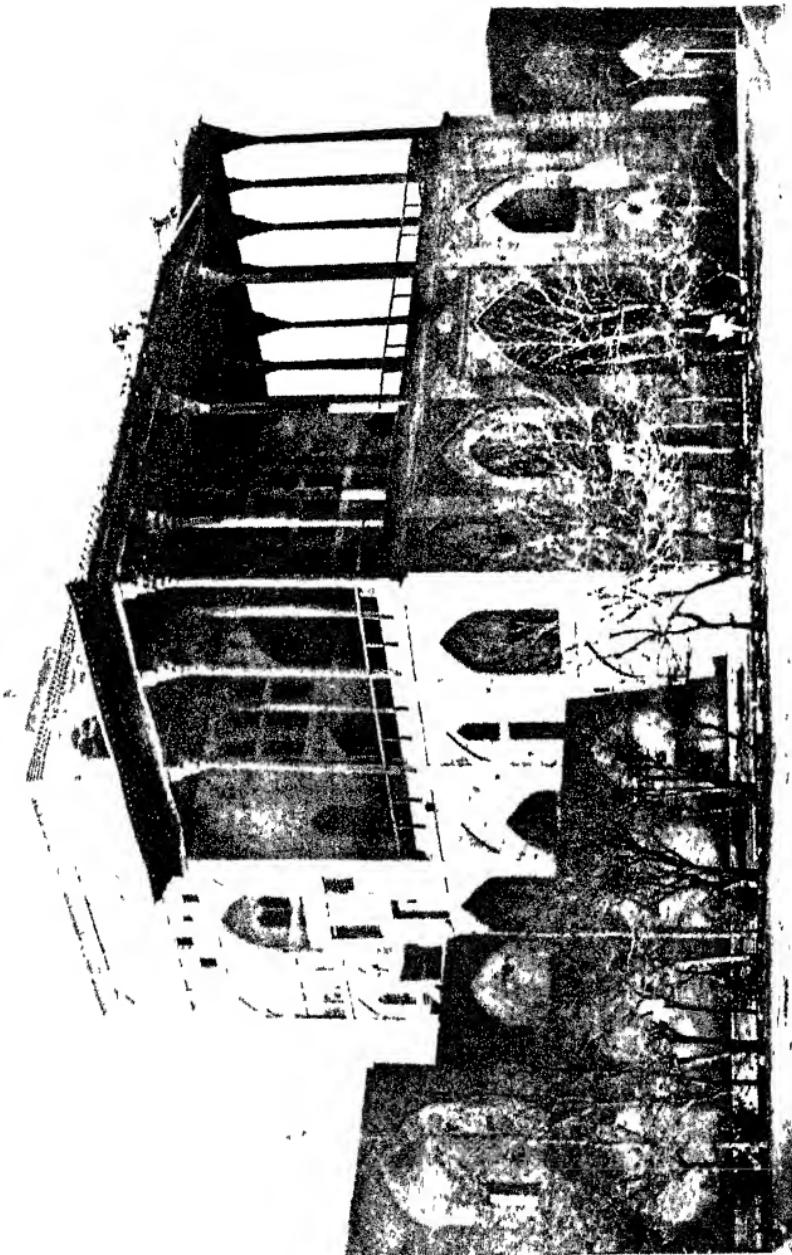
"My dear boy," I replied, "I would look in the opposite direction. Couldn't the Aghá-Báshí come with me and see that I played fairly? What I want is to have a look at the famous *tádár*. Persian women I have seen before to-day. I rely on you to gain the Prince's sanction in the matter."

"It will be impossible, I fear," said Akbar Mírzá. "Even the *mu'ezzin*, sir, is not allowed to call to prayers from the minarets of the Musjid-i-Sháh, lest he should see from there the ladies of the Imperial harem, so he is obliged to stand on the top of one of the *aiwáns* (portals)."

All I said, in reply, was that I hoped my pupils would be content with one wife each. Our meeting with the mad eunuch served the purpose of pointing my remarks.

"You may mock at our cloistering of nuns," I ended by saying; "but it would appear that there are as many convents in Persia as there are men who can afford to keep a plurality of wives."

"His Highness, our father, is of your opinion, Sáhib," said Bahrám Mírzá. "Woe to the son who would take to himself more than one wife! Our eldest brother, the Jalálu'd-Dawla, has only one, and so has our second brother, Sultán Máhmúd Mírzá, who joined your class last autumn for English. He is nearly seventeen years old, and will be a father soon. For my part, I who live in the



THE 'ALÍ KÁPı, OR SUBLIME PORTE OF THE OLD PALACE AT ISFAHÁN



## The Zill is shown to be Wide-awake

harem still have no wish to add to my sorrows in this life by taking to myself ‘a plurality of wives.’ Sorrows enough can be caused by one wife. I would not multiply my sorrows even by two.”

“*Ni moi non plus*” (“Nor would I either”), said Akbar Mírzá. “For my experience is that it is the sorrows that are multiplied by the number of the wives, and not the pleasures! By the life of his Highness, I will have but one wife. May his Highness cut off my head if I have more!”

These sentiments were not to the liking of Humáyún Mírzá, who now came out of *bast* in order to air his views on the subject.

“*Wah-wah-wah-wah-wah!*” he crowed, in unfeigned derision and disgust, buzzing around his brothers like a hornet about to sting. “And you call yourselves men, you weaklings! When I am King of Kurdistán I will have as many wives as I have fingers and toes, that I may not stumble in the paths of knowledge and in the garden of bliss. Twenty wives won’t be too many for me.”

“Don’t talk Persian!” I cried.

“There are advantages in numbers—sometimes,” said Ferídún Mírzá, whose discretion was not always proof against his sense of humour. “Take the case of his Highness, for instance. When the Sháh, our grandfather, was assassinated last year by that son of a burned father, Mírzá Rízá, our father was afraid of sleeping too soundly at nights, lest he also should be murdered by some thrice-accursed Bábí.

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Accordingly, each of his wives took it in turn to keep him awake by beating him upon the breast for half an hour at a time, and this practice was kept up right through the night. The consequence now is that his Highness, having become a slave of the habit, cannot lose himself in dreamland without being beaten upon the breast by his wives. What could he do if he had only one wife? Either he would die of insomnia, or his wife would go mad from want of sleep. From this it is plain that there are advantages in numbers. I have spoken."

" You mean you have brayed—ass ! " said Bahrám Mírzá, who was sorely put about by Ferídún's frank revelation of the secrets of the royal seraglio.

" If Ferídún Mírzá is an ass, you are his brother," said Akbar Mírzá, with an awful gravity. He always took Ferídún's part.

" Precisely," retorted Bahrám, calmly ; " and that is why I forbid him to defile the stables. He has a stall to himself as if he were a Firangi ass ; let him foul that ! " This was an allusion to the Little Lady's private compound. There are no partitions in a Persian stable, the horses being hobbled side by side.

Then Ferídún Mírzá, raising his voice in mellifluous Persian, burst from the bounds of decency which had held him tongue-tied, Bahrám Mírzá retaliating in language scarcely less indelicate. The abuse grew more and more scurrilous. I gave

## The Zill is shown to be Wide-awake

commands—much to the amazement of the boys, who had believed their obscenities to be veiled from my understanding in the obscurity of their mother tongue ; and then there was peace, for a spell, Ferídún Mírzá blushing all over his face with humiliation. When I came to trace the flow of filth to its source, as I did on the following morning, I was told by Dr. Mírzá Huseyn Khán that Persian children are taught such expressions as are unpublishable upon their mother's lap, and made to repeat them in the presence of the father. “Listen,” the fond mother will say to her husband, “how prettily the little soul says, ‘. . . .’ !” Asked if the explanation applied to the children of the House of Kájár, the doctor smiled a sycophantic smile, but was silent. But the boys themselves protested, with all their might, against so base an insinuation.

“Believe me, monsieur,” said Ferídún Mírzá, who adored his mother, the Little Lady, “it is not my mother who is to blame, but my old nurse and the maid-servants. It was they who taught me. I hope you will believe me, for my mother's sake.”

“I am delighted to hear what you say,” I replied, “for Muḥammad the Prophet was right when he said that heaven lies on the knees of the mother.”

“The first word my mother ever taught me, monsieur,” said Ferídún Mírzá, “was the word *múm* [beeswax], and that she effected, first by pressing my lips together between her fingers, and

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then by opening them, saying over and over again the word *múm*. I should not like you to believe that our mothers teach us bad words. Believe me, monsieur, the contrary is the truth. When I was a child, I remember, my mother would set me in my *nanú* [hammock], a foot above the ground, and lull me to sleep by singing, and her songs were always good, and not bad."

Here Bahrám Mírzá, who had been learning a poem by Robert Louis Stevenson, made an apt quotation, cocking his head over the left shoulder and closing his right eye the while :—

“ ‘It is not yours, O Mother, to complain,  
Not, Mother, yours to weep,  
Though nevermore your son again  
Shall to your bosom creep,  
Though nevermore again you watch your baby sleep.’

Ferídún Mírzá is quite right, sair ; our mothers are angels.”

I believed the lads all the more readily because the indecent expressions, as I soon found out, were spoken from the lips outwards, and left no stain upon their minds. Hence it was a comparatively easy task for me to correct this bad habit of theirs, and I am glad to say that it was not long before all such expressions stopped altogether—so long as I was within earshot, anyhow.

When we left the precincts of the 'Alí Kápi, it was to go to the orchard at the back of my house. At my suggestion that the space, a hundred yards by

## The Zill is shown to be Wide-awake

forty, might be used as a playing-field, the Zillu's-Sultán had given orders that the fruit-trees should be cut down, and the ground made level. The Aghá-Báshí, who took an all but paternal pride in every plant and tree within the palace enclosure, could scarce find breath to express his excited dismay at the proposal. But his protestations availed him not : my main object was to get up my pupils' strength by exercise, and no expenditure of sentiment by the Aghá-Báshí could be allowed to thwart my plans. Moreover,—and this was the respect that gave my resolution a final clinch,—no better ground for the purpose could be found thereabouts than that orchard of mine : therefore the fruit-trees—the pears and apples, the apricots and plums, the nectarines and peaches, the vines and pomegranates—had to fall to the axe. Still, the hour was near when, upon entering the garden, I was to feel an acute twinge of remorse, and had to nerve my heart to the sacrifice by telling myself once more that it was not being made in the usual wanton way, but in the best interests of the young princes, whose health and strength should be my first care. Whilst the wood-cutter was wielding his axe, a couple of gardeners, in long blue smocks and baggy blue trousers, gathered the fruit, which they sliced in quarters, and set on benches to dry in the sun. Upon these, the peaches and nectarines and plums, all the young princes pounced with greedy hands—save Ferídún Mírzá, whose tender heart was wrung at the sight of the

## Persian Children of the Royal Family

fruitful trees lying in the dust. First he gave a half-sob, turning his wet reproachful eyes upon my face, then strode to the wood-cutter, who was a Sunni and a Turk.

“Son of a burned father ! ” he cried. “Spare that peach-tree ; it is the most fruitful in the whole garden. It would be a shame to cut it down.”

The Turk looked up, stroking his long red beard.

“Why,” he replied ; “it is ordered.”

“By whom ? ” cried Ferídún, his eyes flashing.

“By his Highness the Prince and by his Excellency the Tutor Şáhib,” was the Turk’s reply.

“Must the tree fall, monsieur ? ” asked Ferídún Mírzá.

“Undoubtedly,” I replied. “Hukm-ast ! ”

“But those young trees, monsieur—you will have pity on them ? ”

Ferídún’s voice pleaded for a row of peach-trees in the middle of the orchard. It would be impossible for us to play football if they should be left standing. There was no help for it ; the young trees had to go.

“Why should they be spared ? ” I asked.

“Because they have not borne fruit yet,” replied Ferídún Mírzá.

“What a poetical little man you are ! I participate in your grief, believe me ; but you must have healthy outdoor exercise, my boy, and where else shall we find a playing-field ? ”

## The Zill is shown to be Wide-awake

“Nowhere else, monsieur,” said Ferídún Mírzá, regretfully.

“The trees would be in our way. Therefore they must be cut down. You might ask the wood-cutter what he thinks about it. He has a humorous eye of his own.”

The question being raised, the wood-cutter stood up, and answered, saying—

“Son of the Prince, may your nose grow fat and your heart the reverse of narrow ! I had a daughter, my only child, and she died two months after her marriage with my brother’s son. She had borne no fruit. There is no God but God. Are you answered ?”

“Well . . . it was ordained,” Ferídún Mírzá assured him, with undemonstrative composure. Then, joining his brothers, he forgot all about the trees in the delight of eating of the fruits thereof. *Que voulez-vous !* In the moods of youth there is no transition : boys pass from the pensive to the frolicsome at a single bound, their powers of concentration being of a piece with those of the ape ; and Ferídún Mírzá, for all his pensiveness, is a true boy at heart.

But Bahrám Mírzá is of a different kidney. Unlike his brothers, who are nothing if not volatile in their attitude to study, Bahrám Mírzá possesses powers of concentration which, savouring, as they do, of the uncanny, have been the means of developing in him a memory of remarkable tenacity. The first novel he ever read was a French translation of “The Captain of the *Vulture*,” by Miss Braddon.

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This book had been given to him by the Zillu's-Sultán in order that the lad might while away his leisure hours in the harem by putting the gist of it into Persian, and be the means of hastening his father's post-prandial nap by reading the translation aloud after tiffin. To that blessed consummation, in fact, each boy had been made the present of a book : Ferídún Mírzá, being the most backward, receiving the most difficult work—Baudelaire's admirable translation of Edgar Allen Poe's "Tales," of which more anon. When Bahrám Mírzá had finished his holiday task I called in doubt the thoroughness of his work, in order to test his knowledge of Miss Braddon's closely woven plot.

"Ah," cried Bahrám, triumphantly, cocking his head over the left shoulder and closing the right eye, "there I waited for you, monsieur ! It is true that this is the first Firangi story I ever read, but it shall not be the last. His Highness is very pleased with Miss Braddon's work. Would you believe it, monsieur, his Highness could not sleep after *nahár* [lunch] to-day ! and as for me, she kept me awake all night ; I was reading, reading, reading ! "

"Ah," I retorted, "there I waited for you, my boy ! What can you possibly know about the book ? "

"I will tell you the tale, monsieur, if you will listen."

"All right," I replied, forearming myself against disappointment by expecting nothing save a blunt, bare outline of the plot ; "begin."

## The Zill is shown to be Wide-awake

Bahrám Mírzá was on his mettle. He made an excellent start. First he told me the title of the opening chapter, then he related the incidents in an interesting narrative style.

"That is the end of Chapter I.," he said. "Shall I go on, monsieur ?"

"If you can," I replied.

He repeated the performance ; after which he waited for the applause.

"Did you skip Chapter III. ?" I asked.

The story took a third jump forward.

"Not so bad !" This from his tutor.

Bahrám Mírzá was nettled.

"Am I boring monsieur ?" said he.

"Get along—get along !" I replied, feigning impatience.

Chapter IV. contributed its quota to the plot.

"I lay odds that the next chapter is a blank !" I cried.

Not a bit of it ! The contents of every single chapter in the book had been as it were pigeon-holed in the recesses of that tenacious memory of his : a *tour de force* all the more remarkable because no such task had been set him either by the Prince or by me.

"Are you pleased with me, sir ?" he asked in English, after telling the story from beginning to end.

"You have paid Miss Braddon a marked compliment," I replied.

"She deserved it," was Bahrám's courteous rejoinder.

## Persian Children of the Royal Family

I next turned to Ferídún Mírzá. "How are you getting on with Baudelaire's translation of Poe?" I asked.

"I cannot understand his French, monsieur," he replied; "it is too difficult for me."

"If I put 'The Fall of the House of Ussher' into simple French, could you translate the tale into Persian?"

"Mais oui, monsieur!" cried Ferídún Mírzá, who is a born story-teller, and would make an entertaining dervish. His interest in the subject encouraged me to do my best to cheat the Zill of his customary siesta after tiffin. After I had put the story into simple words, paragraph by paragraph, and had pointed out the writer's skill in kindling in the reader an ever-increasing dread of the approaching doom, Ferídún lending both his ears to my remarks, I made him sit down and throw off his impression at a heat under "an instinctive rather than technical guidance." His version of the story was an unqualified success. The siesta over, he came rushing into my study, followed by his special eunuch.

"Ten túmáns!" he cried. "His Highness gave me ten túmáns for the story, and did not close an eye! Thank you, monsieur, thank you!"

"To-morrow," I returned, "you shall tell his Highness the tale of 'The Black Cat.' I am busy. Good-bye."

"Thank you, monsieur. I will do even better



PRINCE FERÍDÚN MÍRZÁ. 1898.



## The Zill is shown to be Wide-awake

work to-morrow, that his Highness may make me a present of fifteen *túmáns* ; ” and the lad, so saying, went back to the harem, dreaming, no doubt, of the coveted reward.

The reward, however, remained a dream.

“ What ! ” I said, two days later, “ do you mean to say that his Highness gave you nothing ? How was that ? ”

“ Well, monsieur,” replied Ferídún Mírzá, “ when I was in the middle of the story his Highness, who had eaten a bowl of *piláw* and a dish of *chiláw*, and had drunk a lot of cold tea, gave a loud snore . . . how he snores, monsieur . . . it is terrible to hear ! ”

“ Cold tea ! ” I exclaimed.

“ Mais oui, monsieur ! ” Ferídún was delighted at my bewilderment. “ Cold tea is better for the teeth ! ”

Akbar Mírzá, flinging back his head, burst into a sudden roar of laughter, and I cuffed his head for him.

“ When a Persian takes upon himself the shame of wine,” he explained, rubbing his impudent face, “ he says he has been eating ‘ nightingale’s flesh ’ or drinking ‘ cold tea ’—you see now ; yes, sair ? ”

“ ‘ The Murder in the Rue Morgue,’ then, *versus* ‘ cold tea ’—that shall be our next match. I lay odds on the ‘ cold tea ’ as a soporific.”

“ And so do I, monsieur,” said Ferídún Mírzá, in a voice of funereal depression. It was plain that

## Persian Children of the Royal Family

his heart, dashed by his recent disappointment, was no longer in the work.

"It is fortunate," he said, upon our translating the third story, "that his Highness is very sleepy now after his *nahár* [lunch]."

"Why 'fortunate'?" I asked.

Ferídún Mírzá looked uncommonly knowing. "Because," he replied, significantly.

I had to content myself with the explanation.

The next day came. "Did you have any success with your recital of 'The Murder in the Rue Morgue?'" I said to him.

"None at all, monsieur."

"I am sorry, my boy."

"Oh, it doesn't matter so much now, monsieur."

"Shall I help you with a fourth story?"

"No, thank you, monsieur. I think I can manage by myself now."

"You are getting more used to the style, I suppose."

"That is one reason, monsieur; but I hope his Highness isn't!"

"Isn't what?"

"Getting used to the style also, monsieur."

The second reason was long in revealing itself, and in the end it was an accident that enlightened my fatuous obtuseness.

Many days wore away. Whenever it occurred to me to ask Ferídún Mírzá how he was getting on with his stories, I received the same reply—

## The Zill is shown to be Wide-awake

"Very well, thank you, monsieur. His Highness always falls asleep as soon as I begin."

"Do you need any help in your work?" I would ask.

"No, thank you, monsieur," he would reply. "I can get along now all by myself, and his Highness is always very sleepy after eating."

But at the end of the month, much to my surprise, he came into class and begged me to lend him my assistance. His face wore a crestfallen expression. When I asked him, in all innocence, which of the tales remained to be translated, his face took on a more dejected look than ever.

"His Highness is very wide-awake now," he remarked at last.

"Don't parry the question. Frankness is the best policy."

"Well, monsieur, I have done 'The Fall of the House of Ussher,' . . . and 'The Black Cat,' monsieur, . . . and 'The Murder in the Rue Morgue,' . . . and——"

He raised his eyes to mine, taking the measure of my mood, then turned a trifle pale as to the gills.

"And what else?"

Ferídún's eyes fell. "And his Highness is tired of them, sir, and wants something new," he replied at last, all in a breath.

Akbar Mírzá, chucking back his head, burst into that characteristic laugh of his, guileless, fresh, and hearty.

## Persian Children of the Royal Family

“‘His Highness is very wide-awake !’” he cried in a convulsion of mirth. “‘His Highness wants something new !’”

What I said was “Ah !” What I did was to reach out for the whip.

“Monsieur,” said Ferídún Mírzá in a plaintive voice, “I will tell you the truth. When I told his Highness the story of ‘The House of Ussher,’ he was very pleased, and gave me ten *túmdáns*. But when I told him the tale of ‘The Black Cat,’ which I had translated ever so much better, he fell asleep, and so I lost my present. But notwithstanding my disappointment, I persevered, thank Alláh, and next day I recited ‘The Murder in the Rue Morgue.’ Then, when his Highness fell asleep yet a second time, the Devil came and tempted me, saying, ‘You have translated three stories, two of which his Highness has not heard all through his falling asleep. Why should you translate any more ? All you need to do will be to repeat the stories over and over again in turn.’ And that is what I did do, sir, keeping ‘The Fall of the House of Ussher’ for Mondays and Thursdays, and ‘The Black Cat’ for Tuesdays and Fridays, and ‘The Murder in the Rue Morgue’ for Wednesdays and Saturdays. And that is the whole truth, monsieur, and it was the Devil who told me to do it. . . .”

“Then you must be the Devil’s whipping-boy,” I replied. “Come and receive your punishment like a man.”

## The Zill is shown to be Wide-awake

"But, monsieur, his Highness gave me the sticks when he found me out."

Ferídún's voice pleaded that enough was as good as a feast.

I laid aside the whip. "And how did his Highness find you out?" I asked.

"Well, monsieur," said Ferídún, returning my forbearance by telling the truth, "I made a little mistake. When I was in the middle of 'The Black Cat,' his Highness, who had every appearance of being asleep, opened his eyes all on a sudden, and said to me, 'You read that story yesterday.' Then I knew that I had put the wrong story into my pocket. It was a Wednesday, the most unlucky day in the week, so I begged pardon of his Highness, and went and fetched 'The Murder in the Rue Morgue,' which I began to translate, when his Highness woke up again and said, 'I want something new!' Then, the devil tempting me yet a second time—for was it not a Wednesday?—I fell to reading the story of 'The Fall of the House of Ussher,' and this I did to pacify his Highness, who had been much pleased with the story. Monsieur will judge of my consternation when I tell him that his Highness, now wide-awake, seized me by the ankle and gave me six strokes of his cane on the soles of my feet, saying that the story had given him the *kdbús* (night-mare) half a dozen times at least!"

The unexpected climax threw Akbar Mírzá into a second fit of laughter.

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“Ferídún Mírzá, Prince Fortunate, is not an angel after all!” he cried, ready to burst his sides with merriment.

“Neither is he made of musk and of amber!” said Humáyún Mírzá, in a stage recitative.

“He is famous because he is liberal and just,” said Bahrám Mírzá, smiling a grave, ironic smile.

“Let us practise justice and liberality, then,” sang out Akbar Mírzá, “to the end that we may become even as Ferídún Mírzá.”

“And that is the advice that I was about to give you,” said the impenitent sinner. “In fact, I should have used the self-same words.”

Then the two lads, having brought the tips of their fingers together, raised them to their lips, and from the lips to their forehead, as a token that their thoughts had jumped together.

Bahrám Mírzá said, “That is a Persian custom, Şáhib : we are always of one mind, you and I, so let us do the same thing.”

At that moment a strident hubbub arose outside the compound of the Díván-Kháné. It was as though the damned were imploring mercy at the throne of grace. The young princes looked at one another significantly.

“The women are come again,” said Akbar Mírzá.

“Yes,” chuckled Humáyún ; “it is the women. Bread is dear.”

“They are in a hurry, those women!” Bahrám



THE FIVE BAKHTIYARI HOSTAGES AT THE COURT OF THE ZILLU'S-SULTÁN



The Zill is shown to be Wide-awake cried ; but Ferídún Mírzá, following the dictates of his heart, looked up, saying—

“Are they very hungry ? Is the price of bread very high ? Will his Highness yield to their wishes ?”

“What does it matter ?” said Akbar. “We can’t *see* them.” His tone implied that the sight of their suffering would unman him.

Bahrám knit his brow, meditating. “I know,” he said at last. “His Highness will pacify them now, because he is going to the Sháh’s Court next week, and they will return home in hope and trust. In the absence of his Highness, the price will go up—up—up. Then the women will come back to the Palace, and threaten and weep, and then—God knows ! His Highness is merciful.”

“Mosie,” said Humáyún, “please to permit me to leave the room. I am not well. I beg of you to excuse me.”

“Humáyún,” I retorted, “please to understand that I was not born yesterday. I am not to be caught in your trap. I beg of you to bridle your curiosity.”

Humáyún screwed up his flashing little face into a smile of whole-hearted admiration of my discernment.

“Wah ! wah ! wah !” he cried. “How did you know that I wanted to go and see the women ?”

His ingenuousness raised a laugh.

“By Heaven !” I cried, turning to Bahrám

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Mírzá, “I wish I were in your father’s shoes for half an hour !”

“What would you do, Sáhib ?” asked Ferídún Mírzá.

“I should lower the price of bread.”

“Listen, Sáhib . . . the women are quiet now. Did I not say his Highness was compassionate ?”

“He is also wise, Bahrám. If he is merciful, you should try to be like him. Be kind to women always, boy.”

“I will, sir, always.”

“I am beginning to see that the veil serves more ends than one, Bahrám Mírzá.”

If the reader will turn to the next chapter, he will understand my meaning better, perhaps.

# CHAPTER IX

## THE USES OF THE VEIL

THE first Persian sovereign who ever made the tour of Europe was the late Sháh-Náṣiru'd-Dín. He went everywhere and saw everything, from the courts of kings when they give audience to ambassadors, to theatres "such whereunto the better sort of persons do resort," eager, as one supposed, to get a thorough insight into the working of Western civilization. Indeed, there were not wanting people who predicted that the royal rover would put a stop to all abuses on his return to the home of his fathers. These sanguine expectations, however, were not fulfilled. He went back to Persia laden with treasures of jewels and robes, with cabinets and rarities, and decreed, as an earnest of his reforming zeal, that his wives should adopt a more liberal fashion of toilet. Bribery and corruption, extortion and injustice, might flourish under the Persian sun,—it mattered not; the King of kings, having sat out a French opera, had been charmed with the airy attire of the ballet-girls, and resolved

## Persian Children of the Royal Family

there and then that their light fantastic dress should be thenceforward the only wear in his harem. It would be impossible to conceive a more characteristic trait of the ingrained inconsequence of the Kájár character. But this irrational costume, thanks to the conservative principles of the race, is far from being so fashionable outside the Court circle as European travellers would have us believe. A gentleman about the palace of the Zillu's-Sultán, to whom I had appealed on the vexed question of women's dress, tossed aside the photographs I showed him, saying—

“There are two classes of Persian women who wear that unseemly European attire : those who can afford to lose their decency, and those who do not even know that they have no decency to lose. My mother would rather die than wear it, and so would my ‘uncle’s daughter’ [his wife], thank God ! The old-fashioned Persian dress is more becoming.”

This old-fashioned dress is magnificent when the wealth of the wearer allows it. It consists of a thin gauzy chemisette, trimmed with strings of rubies or turquoises, and hangs down a little below the waist, nearly meeting the top of the trousers, which are fastened with a running string. Over the chemisette is worn a small jacket of rich brocade, reaching to the waist and left open in front so as to show the waistcoat ; and on the head a silk kerchief, pinned under the chin, and covered all over with jewels.\* The trousers afore-mentioned are cut

\* Persian lace is more fashionable than jewels nowadays.

## The Uses of the Veil

exceedingly wide, so that they have the look of ample divided skirts, and are edged with a border of beads embroidered on lace. The richer the woman, the more trousers she wears. Lady Sheil, whose description won the approval of every Persian I read it to, knew several ladies who wore as many as eleven pairs, one over the other. Was this Persian custom, I wonder, the prototype of the crinoline once fashionable among us? The effect produced is precisely the same, the outer skirt being starched so as to keep it stiff. For the rest, the hair is worn loose, and falls over the shoulders in a cluster of ringlets ; or, as the fashion is among the serving-women, it is cut in a straight fringe to the eyebrows, and worn in a couple of stiff curls, peeping out from under the head-dress at each cheek. The feet are covered with fine Cashmere socks, no shoes being worn by either sex in the house, and then the toilet is completed by dyeing the palms of the hands and the finger-nails with henna,\* touching up the eyes and cheeks with antimony and rouge, and covering the arms and necks with bracelets and necklaces.† The beauty of this attire is said to be one of unexampled Oriental splendour. Perhaps it is ; but 'tis certainly a pity that the only men who ever see a Persian woman in all the glory of her beauty adorned are her male relations in the direct line. Love is apt to be blind. A *chúdar-*

\* Ladies still dye their hair with henna, but not their nails.

† The ruby is now the favourite stone.

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*nemdz* is worn while praying : this is a thin silk veil that covers the garments from head to foot.

The first thing a Persian woman does before she goes out visiting is to put on the *chakh-chül*, a kind of Shakesperian hose, "half-boot, half-trousers," all gathered in loose outlandish plaits, into which the ample folds of the divided skirts are crammed. Next she wraps herself round in her sheetlike *chúdar*—a veil of woven silk, either black or dark blue in colour, fitting tightly to the head like a cap, and covering the face and the whole person, in front and behind, to below the knees. Then, over the *chúdar*, she ties round her brow the white linen *riband*, with an open worked aperture for seeing and breathing, which clings to the face and hangs down over the bosom to the waist. A Persian woman, in this impenetrable array, is ready to go out of doors when she has slipped her toes into her little slippers. Generally these slippers are heelless ; once they had a little erection three inches high, which came beneath the middle of the soles of the feet. The single drawback of this outdoor costume, considered from the standpoint of the Persians of the male persuasion, is that it sometimes defeats its purpose : it reduces the main source of masculine concern to comparative safety only by creating another. So effective is it as a disguise, that it is impossible for a husband to recognize his wife, and thus there is an ever-present risk of its serving as a cloak for intrigue. This chapter,

## The Uses of the Veil

however, deals with the uses of the veil, not its abuses.

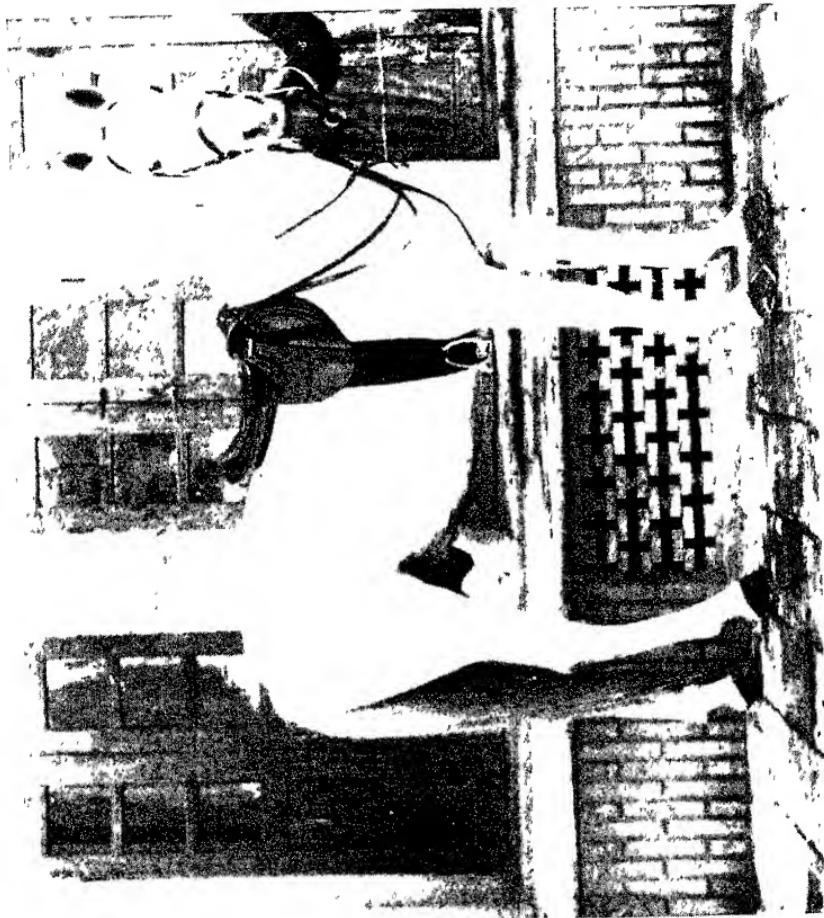
The first effect upon Europeans of a Persian woman in walking costume is one of exasperation. Even the exceptionally cynical have in heart stuff to resent such excessive caution as an affront on their spirit of chivalry and good-breeding. It shocks them to perceive how much of the less-chastened aspect of the national temperament in men may be apprehended from this impenetrable veiling of the woman's face and form divine, and they are chagrined beyond measure to know that they must necessarily share in the infamy which it stamps upon them. A man need not be more than commonly decent to have been cleansed from all impure thoughts by the healing innocence of a woman's eyes, nor need he be clean-washed of original sin to run from the mere reflection of an association with men whose attitude towards women would seem to place them on a level with the beasts that perish.

But this expression of aloofness on the part of the civilized man does not last for ever. Sooner or later his exasperation yields to the levelling influence of custom, until all at once he finds it hard to escape from the fascination of the shrouded apparitions he had once shunned. A lift of the veil from a woman's face is so rare a chance that it can scarce be said either to confirm or to correct conjecture, much less to blunt it, and hence the mystery and the charm of these sudden revelations. You may come across

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a group of Persian women, with their veils flung back for coolness' sake, gossiping round a lonely well, and bearing earthen pitchers on their heads, like Rebecca of old. You may catch a passing glimpse of them in all their beauty as they sit beside some stagnant ditch, filling their hubble-bubbles with water. Or again, you may, if the gods should have cast you in heroic mould, pleasing to a woman's eye, see, amid the seclusion of some barren waste, the coquettish lifting of the veil by some captivated fair one ; in the madding crowd of the bazaars such a conquest will never be yours, though your face out-shine Apollo's in beauty.

It is from such chance sights as these that the European has learned to know something of the national type of loveliness in Persian women. The face, in perfection, is shaped like the moon at the full, and has in its expression not a little of the serenity of the nightly orb. The complexion, matching a ripe nectarine for richness of tone, lends to the dimpled smile a sunset glow, bewitching the eye accustomed to the smiles of the more pallid ladies of these isles of ours. But it is the eyes I would have you look into. All are luminous, liquid, brown. Beautiful they are exceedingly, but seldom, if ever, are they thoughtful. Some people might accuse them of being expressionless on that account. It would be nearer the truth to call them unthinking, animal-looking : that is to say, they are more apt to overflow with feeling than to shine at the splendour of



THE AUTHOR'S ARAB PONY, "WHITECHAPEL."



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some sudden thought. In repose they are full of gentleness and appeal, and timid as the doe's. Being startled, they put on something of the panting look of a deer at bay. A woman, to satisfy a Persian's sense of beauty, should be plump and well-liking. His eye for grace is appeased by a gait resembling that of a pea-hen—an achievement made easy by the odd little slippers women wear.

The prettiest family group I ever saw in Persia came fresh from the studio of Nature herself, and clings to my memory like the burden of a song heard in days long past. A Madonna in her nun-like *chúdar*, riding astride a white ass with slit nostrils and henna-dyed fetlocks and tail, was giving suck to a chubby baby; while her husband, in a rusty-brown *'abd*, a white turban, and a flowing beard, led the ass by the bridle, and cast many a backward glance on the mother and child. Their faces were bare to my sight. On this blank page of mine, I cannot do more than suggest the repose of the solemn wastes at sunset-time; yet the atmosphere must be imagined, if you would realize the devotional charm of the picture; nor can I, in the narrow space that is left to me, give you more than a hint of the expanse of the barren plains, telling more clearly than words that the family was at least two days' journey from its dwelling-place. This homely, unfamiliar group, breathing of fruition in the middle of the desert—can you wonder that I cried out, “Ma-sha'lláh!” never so much as dreaming

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that any sweet Madonna of the solitudes would wrap herself up, baby and all, in her coarse, impenetrable veil of white linen? She covered her face and the child at her breast, very slowly, as if she were loth to hide the healing vision of her maternity even from the unclean gaze of a Firangi; and, in the momentary act of coquetting with custom, whereof she was as unconscious as the babe, her eyes met mine. I drew in my breath sharply, and stood bareheaded in the sun. Reader, do you know the joy there is in the eyes of maternal women, brimming over with the blessing of an inner life shared to the full? I sometimes think their pupils grow big on purpose to let their souls glide through them. They were calm and luminous as the moonlit sphere, those deep dark eyes of hers, cradling her thoughts, pure womanly, in a repose unfathomably serene. And thus at close of day I met with a woman whose yearning had found soothing at last, which is not an occurrence of a commonplace sort.

For it seemed to me, among other things, as I rode across the darkling wastes, as if I had been reading the Divine Story in human characters. The story is growing old, but every time a woman is true to her vocation it gains new life and power. It is told over again, in simple fashion, by many a mother who never heard the name of the Blessed Maid of Bethlehem. It is still, and must for ever be, the joy of the world; “tune to whose rise and fall we live and die.” Let women rise with it, then,

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and live ! Let them give thanks that they are women, the mothers that shall be ! The immemorial blessing of the Persian veil I take to be this—that it necessarily drives a woman, being as it is the mark of the cloistered life, to fix her best hopes and dreams within the family circle rather than without. What might seem to an English gentlewoman a life of unendurable restraint, is to her Persian sisters the most natural life in the world, full of ease and peaceful days. A Persian princess, comparing her position with that of her fellow-countrywomen of the lower ranks, might find it in her heart to envy them the comparative outdoor freedom of their lives ; it might well seem irksome to have to take her walks abroad in a closed carriage as well as thickly veiled, whereas her less influential sisters are allowed not only to do their own shopping, sitting astride an ass or a mule, but also to frequent the public baths, a centre of female society ; for all that the full-aired liberty of European ladies, far from exciting her envy, fills her with a breathless amazement. So long a tether strikes her as being dangerous, unwomanly, shocking. The standpoint is all, and that of most Persian women, be they princesses or not, forms, as it were, the very centre of their family circles. Give them a baby to rock in a hammock, and their thoughts and feelings, like singing skylarks on the wing, will be near at once to the point of heaven and to the point of home. However, if you encroach upon their rights as mothers, as sisters, or as wives, you

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will find that their influence extends beyond the sacred portals of the harem, as many a provincial governor, as even the Sháh himself, knows to his cost. For Persian women are, as a rule, on the side of the angels when they exert their influence to stem the current of public affairs.

Three instances suggest themselves to me, and will serve to illustrate the point. Take, as an example, this case of injustice. A provincial governor makes a corner in wheat and barley, forbidding his subjects to import grain from any market whatsoever outside his jurisdiction. Their daily bread goes up to famine prices in no time, and the women-folk, seeing their children in the danger of starvation, rise up in arms at once. They jump into their trousers, they slip on their veils, they make a raid on the governor's palace. They batter at his gates : the gates are flung open, and the women rush in. They take the *diván-khâne* by storm : they shriek, they wail, they threaten, they plead, they defy, they swear by their mothers' lives that they *will* have cheap bread to live on, and, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, they win the day. The strongest governor, if the women make common cause against his aggression, must mend his ways. Those impenetrable linen veils of theirs, far from being a mark of slavery, come near at such crises to being the white badge of liberty.

Again, it sometimes happens that the innate sense of justice in women expresses itself in the



PERSIAN WOMEN EATING *MELON* AND MELONS, AND SMOKING THE *KHANJ*



## The Uses of the Veil

opposition they make to any inquisitorial interference on the part of licensed concessionaries with the habits and practices of their daily life—an opposition which clashed upon one occasion with the success of a British enterprise, as Násirud-Dín Sháh, the ablest Persian sovereign of the nineteenth century, learned to his cost from the disturbances arising out of the Tobacco Concession in 1891.

In the autumn of the preceding year a complete monopoly of the purchase, sale, and manufacture of native-grown tobacco was granted by the Sháh, and an English company, entitled the Imperial Tobacco Corporation of Persia, was formed to work it. The concession was to hold good for a period of fifty years. So wholesale a bartering of a staple product, regarded in Persia as a necessary of life, excited the fiercest opposition among the people, who took further alarm at the company's exercising the right of search in too reckless a fashion. The suggestion that the privacy of their homes was in danger of being violated sufficed to kindle the irrepressible vitality of the race; and the whole country, headed by the women and the priests, went on strike.

Mírzá Hasan, the High-Priest of the sacred city of Kerbela, declared tobacco to be unlawful to the true followers of the Prophet, and every man and every woman were forbidden either to smoke or to sell it. The priestly prohibition was obeyed: the women, ever to the fore in upholding the rights of the people to develop the resources of the country themselves,

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refused to allow their husbands to smoke in the harems ; raids were made upon suspected tea-shops by vigilance men, who smashed every water-pipe they could lay their hands on ; Ministers of the Crown were coerced by their wives to forswear the soothing weed ; men and women took their walks abroad wearing the sullen and irritable look habitual to smokers who give up the habit too suddenly ; even the Sháh himself had no other choice than to smoke on the sly, like a schoolboy, so overruling was the whim of the ladies of his harem. The result of the strike, probably the most remarkable and certainly the most representative on record, was that the Sháh, in January, 1892, weary of governing a nation of non-smokers, yielded to the popular demonstration by cancelling the entire concession, promising pecuniary compensation for the rupture of contract—a promise which was faithfully fulfilled. Then the gurgling of the hubble-bubble was heard once more in the land, and the national face took on its customary expression of Oriental serenity. The honours of this victory belong to the gentler sex, for the priests could have achieved next to nothing without their whole-hearted co-operation. When I hear people say that Persia is played out, I think of the tobacco strike of 1891, and retort that Persia only awaits a man.

The last instance of all, that ends this summary of the influence of Persian women upon affairs outside their homes, took place a few years ago in

## The Uses of the Veil

Isfahán. The heroine of the little story, strangely enough, is an English gentlewoman, who, contriving to win the love of her Persian sisters by her good works, was rescued by them from a position of imminent peril.

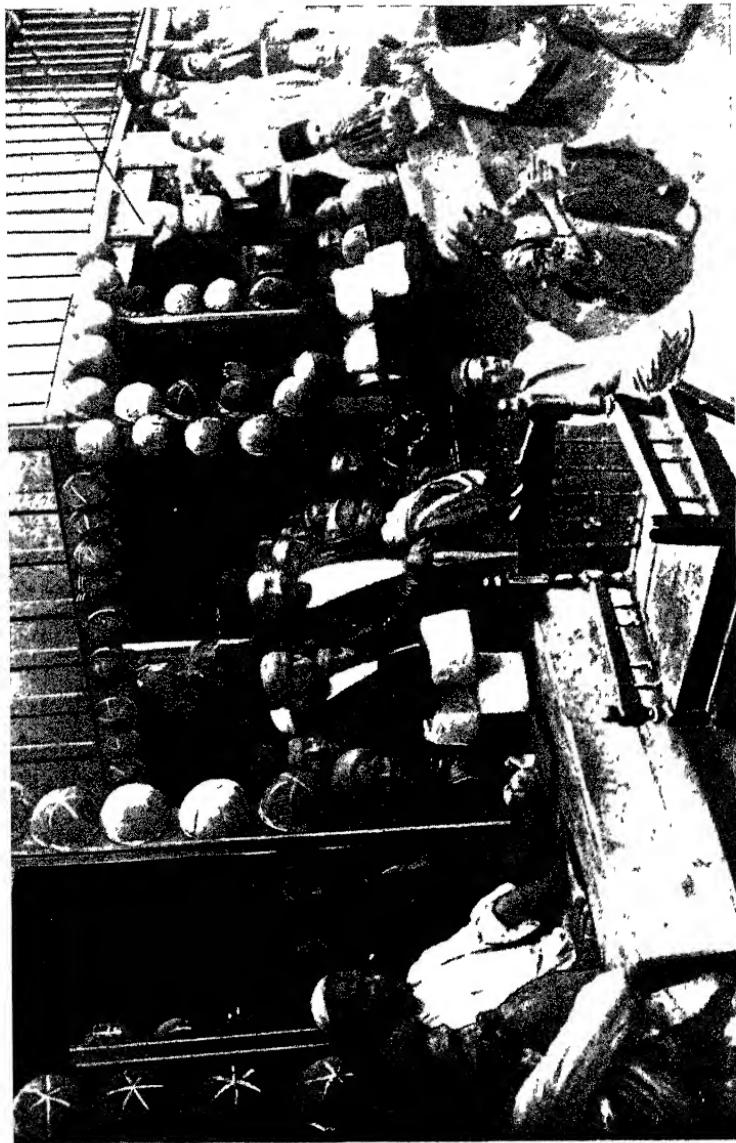
This fearless and enterprising woman, Miss Bird, while she was on the staff of the C.M.S. in Central Persia, took the bold step of opening a free dispensary in the middle of the Isfahán bazaars. Day by day she rode, unveiled, through the vaulted streets, and in so doing risked her life in the cause she held so dear. Insults, ridicule, threats, even ribald tongues, were of no avail to stop her : she pursued her calling with a calm indifference to the danger she was running. At first the women were either too shy or too scrupulous to take advantage of her medical skill. Then, their native curiosity overcoming their qualms, they sought her advice in flocks, and, when they found they derived benefit from her treatment, they went again. Their surrender to the enemy aroused the fanaticism of the men, who brought the matter to a head by locking the dispensary door and barring the entrance. The brave little missionary, when she came riding along, was confronted by a scowling mob of men, shrieking of death to the Infidel. She looked around in search of her friends : not a single woman was there. Her clear-headed appeal to their reason, and the confident expectation that they would deal fairly by her, let loose such an outburst of obscene language from the men in the crowd, that she turned

## Persian Children of the Royal Family

her horse's head and rode back. She reached the open gateway of the bazaar in safety, and there, as luck would have it, she met her women patients, some fifty in number, to whom she related her adventure. Meanwhile the men kept their distance, gathering their brows in a sullen frown. The women, though chary of their strength, liked the men's interference so ill that every woman Jill among them declared herself to be on the side of the "khánúm-i-Firangi." After much talk of their prowess in the field, they bore her back in triumph to the dispensary, forming a vociferous circle about her person, and putting every man they met to the edge of the tongue and the nail. When they had routed the men, and burst open the door, they turned to the missionary lady, bidding her to dismount and "take her brightness" into the dispensary.

Here the sceptical reader might reflect that the Persian women knew that the "European lady," if they would only speak her fair enough, could save them the cost of the doctor. But that is not the point of the story. Whether the substance of their resolution to stand by her was all compact of gratitude, or whether it was veined all through with self-interest, makes no material difference to the argument, which concerns their power to act rather than their motive in acting.

I am not prepared to say what their motive was. Perhaps they acted on the spur of an impulse, as is the way of women. Perhaps they took the



IN THE HATTERS' BAZAAR AT RESHT, NEAR THE CASPIAN SEA



## The Uses of the Veil

opportunity to single out their husbands and pay off old scores under the veil ! It is not unlikely that they were driven to action by such conflicting emotions as gratitude and self-interest. Or, it may be, some broad-hearted principle of the equality and tenderness of their common womanhood gave them the courage to set the sterner sex at defiance by taking up the cudgels in the defence of their European sister. But in any case, their action, whatever their motive might have been, will give you a lively notion of their power in shaping the world outside the harem, and serve as a last example of the immemorial uses of the veil.

# CHAPTER X

## SELF-REVELATIONS

THIS is Bahrám Mírzá's first letter :—  
T

“The Palace,  
“Isfahán,  
“Persia,  
“2nd January, 1898.

“DEAR MOTHER OF *our* MASTER,

“We hope you are well, and if you want of our health we are all quite well, thank God ! We have received the pretty Christmas cards you sent to us, and we thank you for your goodness in sending them to us, but of course we are not Christian princes, as you know ! I write this letter for my brothers who will write to you when they can spell better. If I not know the English words I ask our dear master in French to aid me, but I spell the words all sole. I am content that you sent us the picture of the ship, because I love ships very much, although I have not seen the sea, but *our* Mr. Sparrow tells us many things about the sea and about ships, and we know by core several poems about



MANTEL.



## Self-revelations

English sailors, and the one we like best is about Sir Richard Grenville who said *Let us bang those dogs of Seville, the children of the devil, for I never turned my back upon Don or devil yet!*

“Our good and dear master hardly ever strikes us with his whip now, because he says we are good boys and work well, and we say we are all little and good soldiers of *our* Mr. Sparrow, who is the General !

“All of us who learn English like it very much ; Bahrám Mírzá, who writes this letter, is the best speller, and Akbar Mírzá has the best accent. We translate every day into English a French play very comic called ‘Le Voyage de Monsieur Perrichon,’ and in it I play the part of husband to Akbar Mírzá, and Ferídún Mírzá is our daughter ! and His Highness our Father was very amused when I said that to him, and he laughed loud for half an hour !

“His Highness has promised to send us to England (one or two or perhaps three of us) and we hope we shall see you and *your* Mr. Sparrow. One of us will write to you every week, because we wish you to know us before we come to England, and we hope you will write to us because we have never received a letter from England. *Our* Mr. Sparrow says it will be a good exercise for us to write to you, and then translate your replies into French.

“We have seen your photograph, and we think

# Persian Children of the Royal Family

you are like the Queen of England who made our Father a G.C.S.I.

“Send me some English stamps, s'il vous plaît !  
I am Bahrám !

“We are your good friends who love you,

“BAHRÁM MÍRZÁ (‘Dizzy’).

“SULTÁN MAHMÚD Mírzá (‘Big Brother’).

“AKBAR MÍRZÁ (‘The Magnificent’).

“TIMÚR MÍRZÁ.

“FERÍDÚN MÍRZÁ (‘Mdlle. Perrichon’).

“HUMÁYÚN MÍRZÁ (‘Tommy Atkins,—for I  
*do* like fighting !!’).

“MORAD MÍRZÁ (‘Fatty,—for I am *very*  
fat !’).

“P.S.—Humáyún Mírzá (‘Tommy Atkins’) can't write English ; he said *j'aime à me battre que tu ne sais pas—oui !* and our master wrote the English and Humáyún Mírzá copied it.”

The next letter, from Ferídún Mírzá, was written several months later.

“The Palace of Forty Pillows,

“Isfahan,

“27th April, 1898.

“MY DEAR MRS. SPARROW,

“I hope your healt is good we have been two times to our master's house in Julfa and had ‘tiffin’ with him and his friend Mr. Henwood all



IN A RICE FIELD IN THE PROVINCE OF GUILÁN SHOWING A PERSIAN SCARE-CROW.



## Self-revelations

the plates were English plates and all the drinks were French Morad Mirza is very fat already but after tiffin he wase much fater he ett of all the plates but he would not drink the French wine and he wept great tears when Agha-Basha essaide to make him drink and ran away But he et of all the English plates and after evry plate he was so fatt that our master made him run round the compound for to make place for more plates in his stummuc I ett of all the plates also and of all the wines but the English puddin was the sweatheart of my mouth Akbar Mirza said to Mr. Henwood By the head of his highness your cook is better than the cook of his highness ! After tiffin we went to see the English and Armenies play games First they play a game I liked not much and Bahram Mirza was fattigued also to see it and sed to our Mr. Sparrow When arre they going to play cricket And our master laffed and sed They are play cricket now ! But we liked not the game much so Mr. Henwood said We will play football ! That game we love very much we laffed much to see it and we were glad the English have vaincu the Armenies Mr. Henwood has give us a big football and now we play football every day like English boys and our master is the umpire and teaches us I like football better than French dictée but Homayun Mirza will fight in place of playing He fights all the time he loves to fight he says to me when I play football 'I can kick the ball more far than you !' I say It is good ! or

## Persian Children of the Royal Family

I say No ! If I say No Homayun runs to the ball and takes it in his hand and says I will prouve to you that I can And then Mr. Sparrow blows in his wissel ! Every time Homayun makes like that and our master calls him Tommy Atkins But he will not play the game right.

“The river is full of water now because we have had much rain and the snow in the hills is melt yesterday a man was drowned in the river there were some women there and the man desired to prouve to them how well he could swim ! We had two weeks hollydays at Noo Rooze the Pershun New Year and amused us very much All my brothers who know not Engleesh send to you and *your* Mr. Sparrow their best love and I also It is necessarey that I ask you to send me some stamps

“Your affectionate

“FERIDUN MIRZA.

“P.S.—When I wentt to Julfa and sore the Armenie women in their wite *chudaws* I had much fear and fort they were goasts our Pershun women carry black and are not terrible to see The next time I went I had not fear and regarded the women in the faces you cannot see the faces of our Pershun women it is more convenable but our master who has not a woman must be lonly.”

Akbar Mírzá adopts a more man of the worldly tone—

SURGICAL INSTRUMENTS - A FORTRESS PLACED IN THIEN-SHAN AND  
IN COURSE AT TURKEstan, NEAR ISKANDAR





## Self-revelations

“ The Palace of Chehil Situn,  
“ Isfahan,

“ Persia,

“ 27th April, 1898.

“ MY DEAR MADAME—

“ I hope you are well, and also your husband. I am not ; I have had the fever, and am still weak, or what Mr. Sparrow calls ‘ cheap.’ I was so ill that I had to go to an English doctor in Julfa, whose name is Carr, and he gave me some medicine. It was beastly stuff.

“ The other day, a week ago, I think, my Mother fell sick, and asked me to write to the English lady doctor in Julfa to come and see her. In Persia, you see, there are not any lady doctors, and the men are not good for ladies because they are not permitted to see and examine their patients. If they desire to feel the lady’s pulse, for example, or to examine her tongue, they must wait for the lady to put her arm or her tongue through a hole in a big screen. You will laugh, as our master, and think I speak not the truth. But it is quite true : it is the custom of the country. So you will understand why my Mother asked me to write to the English lady doctor who is very kind and clever. I like her very much, and when I wrote the letter I said on the envelope—‘ My dearest Miss S—— ’ She told our master that she had sent the envelope home. I not knew it was not the custom in England to put on the envelope the words you write in the letter. What

## Persian Children of the Royal Family

is comic in England is not comic in Persia, and what is comic in Persia is not comic in England. Every country has his customs, and I shall learn to be like an Englishman *kam kam*—little by little. I can play football already, I can eat with a knife and fork, but the fingers are better, I think. Our master's cook is very good. We had tiffin with him, but Ferídún will write about that. After the tiffin, we saw a game of football, and after that our master and Mr. Henwood took us to an Armenian shop and made us many presents. We went back to the Palace with many toys. Bahram Mirza's toy was beautiful, and His Highness and our mothers played with it like us. It was an elephant with ivory tusks. It had a key like a watch for to make it go. It walked all round the anderun where our mothers live just an elephant alive. But it is dead now. The ladies of the anderun played with it too much and deranged the mechanique inside, and then it would not go more. It died when we were in school.

“The river is running over with water. It is a strange river. In summer there is no water in it. In spring it is full, and breaks down the bridges. Our master could not come to school yesterday because the bridge of thirty-three arches was flooded. The current is so strong now that it would carry away an elephant, if the elephant tried to swim. It is not like other rivers that flow above the ground into the sea. Our river the Zayanda-Rud goes like that at first, then he loses himself and sinks into the



T-4F VILLAGE OF SOI RUND IN THAILAND IN WINTER



## Self-revelations

earth, and people say he comes out again between Bushire and Bassora, in the Persian Gulf. Do you think it is true? I wonder what he does under the earth, and think he must be happy when he reaches the sea at last.

“I have not speld all the words by myself.

“With my love,

“I am,

“dear Madame,

“Yours affectionately,

“AKBAR-MIRZA.”

Bahrám Mírzá’s second letter is more reserved than his first.

“The Palace,

“Isfahan,

“27th April, 1898, A.D.

“MY DEAR MRS. SPARROW,

“I put A.D. because I use the Christian date. Our master will not talk to us about his religion ; he says religion is not good if it does not teach us to be compassionate and charitable : he was very angry with us when we burned Omar, who was the false Caliph, and whose generals came to Persia to destroy the people because they worshipped Fire. We worshipped Fire then, but we burn Omar now ! It is very funny ! But our master *se met en colère* if we say that the Sonnis are sons of burned fathers, and Humayun says he is glad. But he will not

## Persian Children of the Royal Family

allow Humayun to burn the Shias, which is quite right. Feridun is a good Shah : he fasts in Ramazan. I do not fast : am I therefore, a bad Shah ? Our master says, ‘ Fast if you will ; but remember this—I shall punish you if you do not know your lessons ! ’ So I do not fast in Ramazan. The priests say we are unclean because we have an English tutor, and they would not allow his Mirza to buy food in the bazaars because he was teaching our master Persian. What fools the mullas are !

“ It was very kind of Mr. Sparrow — yours not ours—to paint for me the picture of the little Revenge. My mother thinks you are very good to write to me, and she says she would like to know you. And I should like to meet you also, but I am sorry to say that we are not going to England after all, because our uncle, the Shah, wants us to stay in Persia. It is a great disappointment to me.

“ Mirza Ahmad Khan, Mr. Sparrow’s assistant, got married yesterday to Akbar Mirza’s cousin, so of course he has not come to school to-day !

“ And I am with love,

“ Your affectionate,

“ BAHRAM-MIRZA.”

## CHAPTER XI

### CONCERNING A QUESTION OF PILATE'S

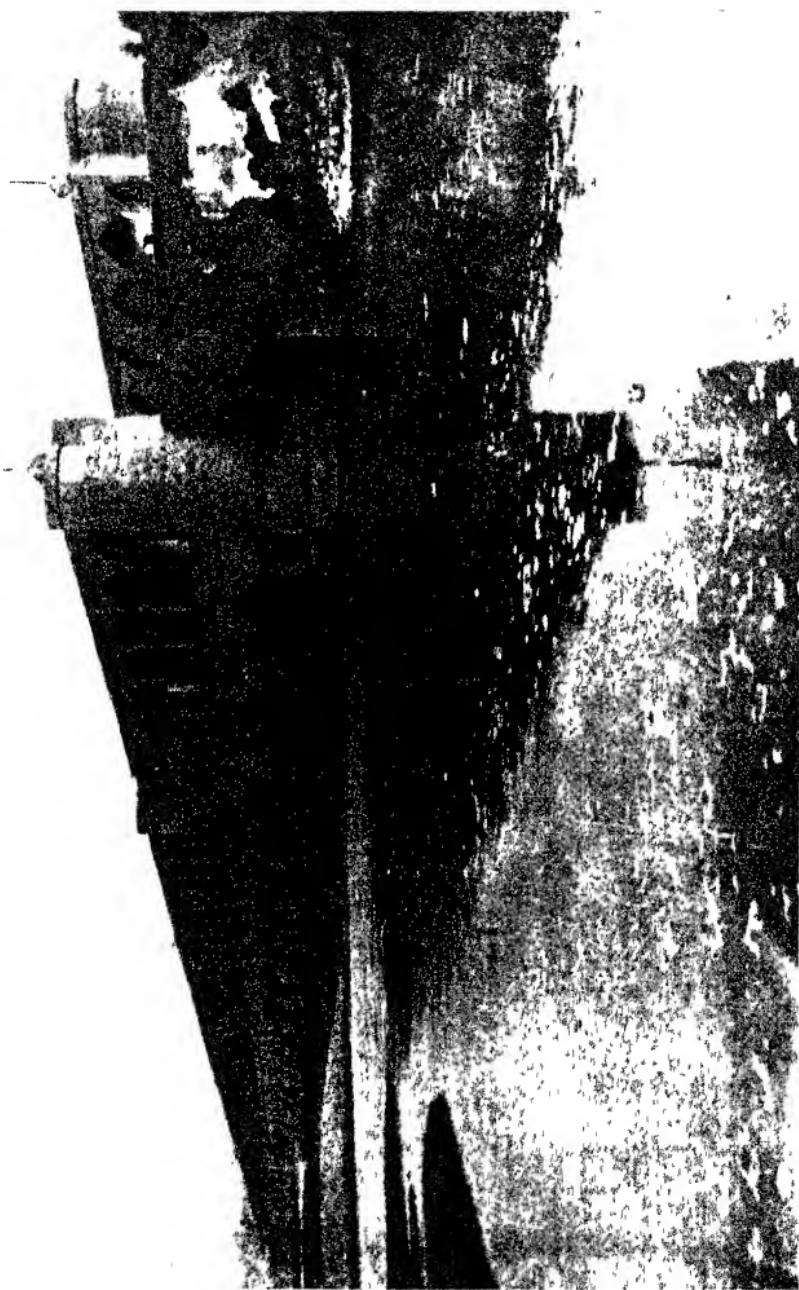
THE most beautiful building within the precincts of the Court is that of the Judgment-hall of *Chahil Sutún*, or Forty Pillars. It is situated at the end of a blazing garden, and faces a big tank in which its twenty wooden pillars are reflected. As the appellation of Royal Sea (*Daryā Shdh*) was intended to express the exceptional size of the tank, so the numerical title of Forty Pillars was meant to designate the magnificence of the Judgment-hall. It was originally built by 'Abbás Sháh, and stood for a hundred years as a monument not unworthy of his greatness. Of its four stages, the outermost, the pillared verandah, was open to the garden on three sides, and had walls at the farther end covered along the bottom with a wainscoting of marble, and above with the unrivalled Persian *d'iné kárl*, or mirror-work, set in facets and panels. Immediately behind this loggia was the *Tálár*, or Throne-room, with its coffered ceiling adorned with a brilliant scheme of coloured

## Persian Children of the Royal Family

arabesque in red, blue, gold, and green, and with its three walls flashing all over with mirrors and crystals ; and from this compartment, but on a higher level, opened the *Sháhnishin*, a deeply recessed dais, on which stood the royal throne. The King, sitting within this lovely little alcove, with its vaulted ceiling, as it were, honeycombed with odd indentations, could command an unbroken view of the *tádár*, the verandah, the tank, and the garden. The last stage of all, behind the Throne-room and the Sháh's recess, and in communication with them by three doors, was a great hall, crowned by three low cupolas, and decorated over nearly the whole extent of its walls by six immense pictures, three on each side, representing Isma'il Sháh engaged in combat with the Janissaries of Sultán Suleymán ; Tahmásp Sháh entertaining Humáyún, the refugee Indian prince, at a banquet in 1543 ; 'Abbás Sháh the Great bestowing a like favour upon Abdúl Muhammad, the Uzbeg chieftain ; Isma'il Sháh leading a cavalry charge against the Uzbeg Tartars ; 'Abbás Sháh II. entertaining Khálíf Sultán, ambassador from the Great Mogul ; and finally the battle between Nádir Sháh and Sultán Mahmúd, that decided the fate of Delhi.

The wooden columns supporting this magnificent structure were placed in four rows of three each and in two rows of four each. Of these the outer row was cunningly inlaid with tiny mirrors set diamondwise in perpendicular bands, and the inner

THE "TAKHT-i-SULTAN" OR BRIDGE OF THIRTY-ONE ARCHES, AT ISPAHĀN



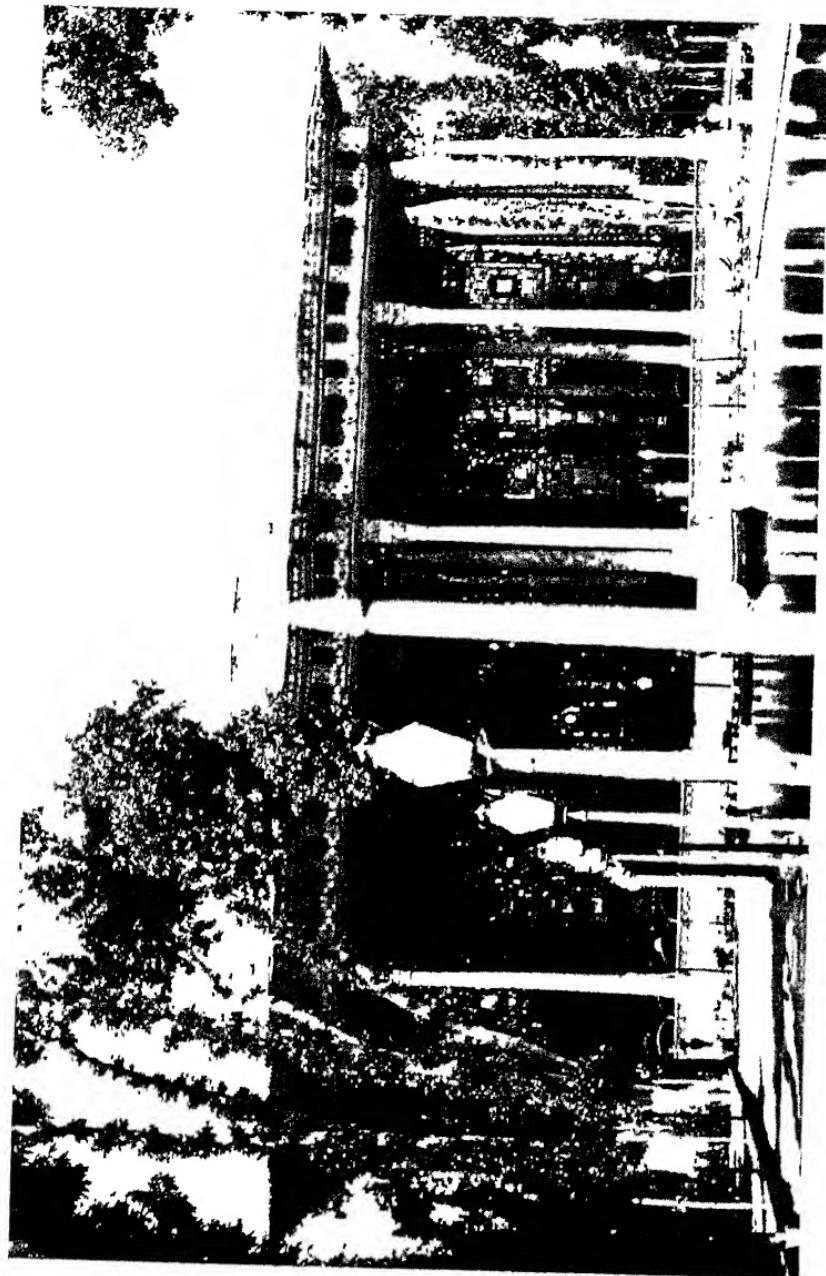


## Concerning a Question of Pilate's

rows, resting on groups of stone lions, with glass set in spirals. The four central pillars, says Curzon, stood at the angles of a marble basin, into which the lions that look that way spouted water from their mouths. The flat roof of the pillared verandah was supported on rafters (hidden from sight), composed of the boles of entire chenars or planes, seven feet round, and untouched by axe or tool ; and the walls of the picture-gallery at the back were of a thickness to resist the ravages of time. The exhaustless profusion of its splendid materials, it has been well said, reflected not only their own golden and crystal lights upon each other, but all the variegated colours of the garden ; so that the whole surface seemed formed of polished silver and mother-of-pearl encrusted with precious stones. It had the look of a fairy palace ready to melt into air, so skilfully was the immense solidity of the walls and roofs disguised in the glittering sheen of the brittle facings. According to Krusinski, the Polish Jesuit, who was living in Persia at the time, the *Chahil Sutún*, which had seemed built to resist all the elements, was destroyed almost entirely by fire in the reign of the superstitious idiot, Sultán Huseyn Sháh (1694-1722), who, seeing in the destruction a dealing of Alláh to His creatures, declined to interfere with the flames. However, no sooner was the divine will fulfilled than he set to work restoring the palace to its pristine state of splendour. My belief is that his superstitions had been overcome by common sense before

## Persian Children of the Royal Family

the picture-gallery was in any immediate danger of demolition, since there can be very little doubt that four of the six famous mural paintings are the ones described by Chardin about the year 1670; that of Nadir Sháh (1736-1747) being, of course, the work of a later period. Nor is it unlikely that the *Tádér* and the *Sháhnishin* escaped the fate of the outermost loggia; if the contrary be the case, then the task of restoration must have been carried out with a reverential regard to the original design; for those two exquisite compartments present as brilliant an effect as ever, the coffered ceiling of the one vying with the honeycomb vaulting of the other in the sumptuousness of its decorations, and the exquisite mirror-work on their walls being still intact. Undimmed by time, also, is the gorgeous colouring on the ceiling of the pillared verandah. The truth is that such changes as have taken place in the course of years can be traced to the Kájár vandalism of the Zillu's-Sultán, who, not content with lopping half the branches off the noble chenar-trees in the garden, has dared to lay hands on the mirror-work that decked the wall of the outermost loggia, which now wears a pale pink flush (of shame). The superb facings of the columns, too, have been removed, yielding empire to a vulgar coating of brown and red paint; the basin of white marble within the central pillars has been filled in; and water has ceased to flow from the lion's mouth in consequence. The dimensions of the four stages, as given by



1-41 JUDGMENT-HALL OF ISFAHAN, OR QEYSARIEH, OR FORTY COLUMNS, WITHIN THE OLD PALACE ENCLOSURE AT ISFAHAN



## Concerning a Question of Pilate's

Curzon, are correct. The verandah is 44 yards by 22 ; the *Tálár*, 19 yards by 16 ; the *Sháhnishín*, 23 feet by 19 ; the picture-gallery, 80 feet by 40.

The *Chahil Sutún*, since it was first erected by the ablest Persian sovereign of modern times, has been put to many uses. It was there that the old Safaví kings gave audience to ambassadors, and received their ministers in levée, and sat in judgment upon such as had offended. Mounsey in 1866, and Madame Dieulafoy in 1881, found the loggia employed as a workshop for the tent-makers of the Prince-Governor. This particular form of desecration, however, has since been abandoned, the Zillu's-Sultán, in 1891, sitting in daily audience in one of the smaller compartments which open out of the Throne-room on either side. Then, on the Zillu's-Sultán's removing to the *Diván Kháné*, the *Chahil Sutún* came to be a fashionable parade, a resting-place for loafers, and an unofficial *rendez-vous* for the gentlemen about the Court ; until last of all, in 1898, the young princes and I took up our abode there in school-hours. Many a time have we roamed all over the rafter-loft, and our names are inscribed on the giant boles of chenars that support the cupola-crowned ceiling of the picture-gallery and the flat roof of the columned verandah. I sometimes think that the famous old Judgment-hall of 'Abbás Sháh the Great had never been put to a better use than when it served as a lecture-room for the vindication of the spirit of British Imperialism. But this chapter,

## Persian Children of the Royal Family

which has opened with the above description of *Chahil Sutún*, deals not inappropriately with a certain question of Pilate's, which I took it into my head one day to ask my special pupils.

"Boys," I said, "we are on historic ground. Akbár Mírzá, I notice that you are wearing your boots. Take them off at once, and set them on the other side of the door-sill. I will gate you for a week if you ever enter a room again with your boots on. I like your behaviour in that respect so ill that it will go hard with me to forego the pleasure of administering the chastisement you deserve. Do you know what I had it in my mind to say before I became aware of your act of courtesy?"

"No, sir."

"I will tell you. I was about to say that this hall had seen many a miscarriage of justice. I am adding to the number in not chastising you for your rudeness. Such leniency will not be mine upon the second offence. . . . You should know the historic associations of *Chahil Sutún* better than myself. What I would advise you all to do is to cultivate, within these walls, the principles of truth and justice, that you may be worthy to inherit what was just and honourable in the history of the past. By-the-by, *what is truth?* Do not all speak at once. I will give you half an hour for meditation. Then I shall question you as to your reflections, and write down, in your mark-books, a report of the conference."

"Will you give us marks, sir?"

## Concerning a Question of Pilate's

"Yes, Bahrám Mírzá; the highest possible will be twenty."

"It's a question for little *mullás*, and I am a young soldier."

"What was that you said, Humáyún Mírzá?"

"Mosie mon ami," replied the incorrigible Kurd, "I am a little soldier—yes, sir? I love fighting. It is only *mullás* that love such questions as *What is truth?*"

"Fight if fight you must, but to fight in a bad cause is wicked. Remember that, Humáyún."

"Why is it wicked, mon cher maître?"

"You bloodthirsty young barbarian! would you jeopardize your soul in the defence of a lie?"

"I ask pardon of God!" cried Humáyún Mírzá.

I judged his tone to negative the proposition.

Akbar Mírzá burst out laughing all on a sudden, and was summoned to render an account of his secret jest.

"Please, sir," said he, "I was thinking that if one of us should answer the question right, he would deserve more than twenty marks."

"What should be the reward, then?" I asked.

"He should gain salvation, sir—go to heaven at once."

"Why?"

"Because!" replied Akbar, with unanswerable finality.

"No," said Bahrám Mírzá, thoughtfully; "he should go, not to heaven, but to jahannam."

## Persian Children of the Royal Family

"Oh, should he?" cried Akbar Mírzá. "Isn't Persia hot enough in summer?"

"Why should he not go to jahannam," broke in Ferídún Mírzá, "since it is Bahrám Mírzá who is the wisest of us all?"

"But why should the wisest go to jahannam, thou ass?" Humáyún's voice was toned to the crowing of a cock.

Bahrám Mírzá, having drawn everybody's attention upon himself, popped his head over the left shoulder, and closed the right eye.

"He should go to hell at once," he replied dryly, "to communicate the truth to those who died in ignorance."

This unexpected reply pleased nobody so much (save the speaker) as it did Humáyún Mírzá, whose emotional lips trembled to emit his customary expression of admiration.

"Pa-pa-pa-pa-pa!" he cried. "Oh, wise boy, who discoursest of mysteries, may thy mouth never be without sugar!" Then, flinging his arms round Bahrám Mírzá's neck, he gave him a quick, impulsive kiss on the mouth.

"Oh, Parrot," replied Bahrám, readily, "who misquotest the words of Háfiz, may thy beak be stuffed with 'nightingale's flesh,' that thou mayest learn to sing!"

"Silence!" I cried. "This is the time for meditation. You shall discourse of mysteries later on."



H.H. ZILLU'S SULTÁN AND HIS FAVOURITE SON, PRINCE AKBAR MÍRZA



## Concerning a Question of Pilate's

Bahrám Mírzá went off in a brown study at once, knitting his brows in a resolute frown; Ferídún Mírzá, idly turning over the leaves of Sale's "Koran," smiled pensively to himself; Akbar Mírzá looked as if he were telling over the numerals, and had lost count from lack of concentration; and Humáyún Mírzá sat on his chair, like a hawk on a bough, ready to swoop down upon the first victim that should come his way. To him the thirty minutes seemed an eternity.

"Well, Ferídún Mírzá, I will begin by asking you, because you are the oldest. What is truth?"

"The voice of conscience, sir."

"But what is conscience?"

"It is the voice of God."

"That being granted, would it not be possible to improve upon your first definition? Come—reflect a while."

"Yes, sair, I think I can. . . . I will say that truth is the voice of God."

"Would you say that God speaks in more than one language?"

Ferídún's reply was glib enough. "There is no Gód but God: Muhammad is the Apostle of God: 'Alí is the Friend of God."

"Let it be granted," I replied. "Now tell me what truth is, to your mind."

"Truth, sir, is the voice of God speaking through Muhammad and 'Alí."

"Is that your last word, Ferídún Mírzá?"

## Persian Children of the Royal Family

"I have answered, sir. How many marks will you give me ?"

"I should be better pleased with your definition, if you had followed your first thought to its logical conclusion without my help. Do you find the answer satisfactory, Bahrám Mírzá ?"

"Y-y-yes, sir," he replied guardedly. "It is enough for us ; it is not enough for you."

"Nor for the Turks !" Humáyún made haste to interpolate, sturdily enough, according to his custom. "They say that 'Omar was the Friend of God."

"I spit on the pate of 'Omar," said Ferídún Mírzá, uncompromising in his orthodoxy. "May his grave be defiled ! "

"You believe you hold the Mirror of Truth," said I. "Keep it bright, then ; don't breathe foul breath upon it, boy ! I await your reply, Bahrám Mírzá."

It was plain that he had been waiting for the word from me, for he was all eagerness to speak.

"Truth is a Bird, sir, that flies so fast that the eye of man cannot follow it, and so high that it is lost to sight beyond the skies. But every now and then one of its feathers falls down, and, when it touches the earth, it takes the shape of a prophet. Muḥammad was such a prophet, sir, and so were Moses and Jesus. No man on earth has heard the Voice of the Bird, nor shall he hear it till he sits down beneath the lote-tree in heaven."

## Concerning a Question of Pilate's

"And how shall a man attain to heaven ? "

"By following the teaching of his prophet, sir."

"I shall give you twenty marks, Bahrám Mírzá."

Bahrám became a boy at once, rose to his feet, danced a stately *pas seul*, patted himself on the back, then sat down again, twinkling all over his face.

"But, of course, my prophet is Muḥammad, you understand—yes, sir ? " he said, a roguish twinkle in his eyes.

"And how many marks for me, sir ? " asked Ferídún Mírzá, for the second time.

"I should give you fourteen, if you had not defiled 'Omar's grave," I replied with unflinching solemnity. "As it is, I shall give you twelve. It is your turn, Akbar Mírzá."

Akbar Mírzá raised his frank face. "I think truth is not to tell lies."

The words had scarcely passed his lips, than the irrepressible young hawk, Humáyún Mírzá, had his arms about Akbar's neck.

"You have caught Bahrám Mírzá's bird ! " he cried. "You have it ! you have it ! Thank God ! "

"You have answered a somewhat different question, Akbar. I was thinking of truth in its speculative sense ; but since the reply comes from your heart, I shall give you ten marks. And now, Humáyún Mírzá, what have you to say ? "

"I am like Akbar Mírzá, mosie ; we have kissed ; it is well."

"Five marks," said I.

## Persian Children of the Royal Family

“Five !” almost yelled Humáyún Mírzá.

“I said that first, Humáyún,” I replied.

“Did you not give Akbar Mírzá ten ?”

“Certainly. Wasn’t he the master ? and weren’t you the parrot ?”

“But, mosie mon ami, he would have been the parrot, if you had asked me first. We had the same thought.”

“True ; I never thought of that. Would you have expressed the thought in the self-same words, though ?”

“No, no, mosie ; I ask pardon of God ! I should have said, ‘To tell the truth is to give alms to one’s conscience.’ *Ball* (yes).”

I laughed out loud. “And has your conscience to beg very, very hard ?”

Humáyún Mírzá raised both his hands to his cheeks, the palms upward.

“Oui, mosie mon ami,” he replied ingenuously, “très !”

I laughed more heartily than ever. “I think I like you this morning, Humáyún Mírzá,” I said.

“Do you not love me every day, mon cher maître ?”

“Upon my word, Humáyún, I believe I do—I can’t help it.”

“It is well, mosie mon ami.”

“Wait a bit, my boy. I am going to test the generosity of that tongue of yours. I know it to be ingenuous. I should like to be sure that it is

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'charitable.' Now, who told you that to tell the truth is to give alms to your conscience?"

"God knows," he replied.

"Was it your mother?"

"No, no, mosie. Nobody told me. It came into my head. This is how I thought of it. Yesterday my mother asked me a question, and I told her a lie, and my conscience said to me, 'Tell the truth, and you will be rich, and I shall be happy.' It was like the voice of a woman begging for alms in the street outside the palace walls,"—and the inimitable young mimic, squatting himself on the floor, beat the carpet with both hands, crying, "'O son of the Prince, give me something, give me a piece of silver, and God will grant you salvation!' It was exactly like that, mosie," he said, rising to his feet again.

"Sit down, Humáyún Mírzá. I shall give you eleven marks."

"I am glad that I spoke up for 'Omar," said Humáyún, flashing his eagle eyes upon Ferídún Mírzá.

"You have eaten dirt, mon frère," said the invincible Shiah. "I defile the head of 'Omar."

I opened the Kur'an at the chapter entitled, "The Inner Apartments."

"Listen to the voice of Muhammad, the Prophet," I said. "'If two parties of the believers contend with one another, do ye endeavour to compose the matter between them: and if one of them offer an insult unto the other,

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*fight against the party which offered the insult, until they return unto the judgment of God. . . . O true believers, let not men laugh other men to scorn ; who peradventure may be better than themselves. . . . Neither defame one another ; nor call one another by opprobrious appellations. An ill name it is to be charged with wickedness, after having embraced the faith. . . . Inquire not too curiously into other men's failings : neither let one of you speak ill of another in his absence.'* Now, Feridún Mírzá and the rest of you, I shall thrash the boy that ever calls 'Omar 'by opprobrious appellations.' It is quite evident that Muḥammad despised that kind of petty-mindedness. Does he not say, 'Would any of you desire to eat the flesh of his dead brother ?' It is strange that you, Feridún Mírzá, who are in every other particular a gentlemanly lad, should be for ever eating, as it were, the flesh of your dead brother, in matters of religion. Let me have no more of it. And now give me your mark-books."

Bahrám Mírzá, Feridún Mírzá, and Humáyún Mírzá brought me theirs at once ; but Akbar Mírzá, glancing at me furtively out of the tail of his eye, began to make excuse, saying—

"I cannot find my mark-book anywhere, sir. It must be lost, I think."

"There is no denying the fact that your marks have been mostly *minus* qualities of late," I said, dryly.

Akbar Mírzá's cheeks took on a nectarine flush. "May I eat dirt, if I was afraid of your showing the

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book to his Highness," he said all in a breath, replying to the tone of my remark, as is the way of boys in the east as in the west.

"That being the case, I must insist upon your finding it. If it is not here, it might be in the *andarún*. Go and look."

"It is not in this room, sir."

"Is it in the *andarún*?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Go and look."

"Sir, his Highness will be angry with me, if—"

"My dear boy, I cannot possibly take the Prince's anger into consideration. The book must be found. I will not have you in the class until it is forthcoming. Off you go."

In half an hour's time he came back.

"The book?"

"I have sought, but I have not found it, sir."

"Begone."

"Sir, his Highness will be in the *andarún* now. Please excuse me, sir."

"Akbar Mírzá, you have not told me a single untruth in all the months we have worked together. I believe you to be absolutely truthful. Be frank now. Have you destroyed the book?"

"No, sir, by the head of his Highness."

"Then the mark-book must be somewhere. Go and look for it again."

The next day, I asked him the same questions,

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and received the same replies, with this result for Akbar Mírzá, that he was again banished from the precincts of *Chahil Sutún*. The light dawned upon the third day, but not upon the whereabouts of the missing book, nor upon the release of the prisoner on parole. On the fourth morning, however, he entered the class-room, and flung himself upon my mercy with characteristic frankness.

“Sáhib,” he said, “you are the master ; my ear is in your hand ; I am your slave ; may I be also your sacrifice ! The mark-book is not lost, it is destroyed. It was I who tore it in pieces.”

“The giving of alms, Akbar Mírzá, is, as you know, specially recommended by Muḥammad. I am glad that you have appeased your conscience at last. Humáyún Mírzá was right when he said that ‘to tell the truth is to give alms to one’s conscience.’ Sit down.”

He obeyed, looking extremely crestfallen.

“Don’t be downhearted, my boy. Cheer up. All is forgiven and forgotten.”

“I am your sacrifice, sir,” he replied.

“Upon my life, that is exactly what you look like,” said I. “For Goodness’ sake, try and wear a more cheerful expression. Is it my fault that you haven’t a single mark to your name ? ”

“That is not the reason that I am sad, sir.”

“Is it not ? What is the reason, then ? ”

“God knows,” he replied.

“Undoubtedly. But won’t you enlighten me ? ”

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"I like better not to say, sir."

"Of course, I cannot insist upon your confiding your troubles to me. But I do not like to see you so woebegone. Have you forgotten how to smile?"

Akbar Mírzá, making a manful effort, summoned so livid a smile from the depths of his misery, that I implored him to weep outright and have done with it. Much to my surprise he took me at my word, and burst into tears. I went home, meditating. The next time I saw him, he was his own man again, and so I dismissed the whole matter from my mind. But one day, some three or four months afterwards, when I was setting the book-shelves in order, I came across Akbar Mírzá's mark-book, hidden behind a row of the "Student's Modern Europe." I turned round, and faced the class.

"What is the matter, sir?" asked Bahrám Mírzá.  
"You look as if you had seen a ghost."

"Precisely," I replied; "I have just seen the ghost of a book that departed this life some three—or was it four?—months ago. The strange thing is that it is not in bits, as the ghost of a book should be, but has every appearance of being fit to serve a useful purpose for some months to come. I wonder whether Akbar Mírzá will recognize it or not. Here it is;" and I set it on the desk in front of him.

"It is my mark-book," said he.

"Which you destroyed," I added.

"It is—" He paused, overcome by prescience.

"—A miracle, Akbar Mírzá?"

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"No, sir ; it is the first lie I ever told you. That is why I was sad when I told it. Did I not weep, sir ? "

Then I recalled his expression of unutterable misery.

"Yes, I remember now. But why, having told the truth in the first instance, did you not stick to it ? "

"I will tell you all, sir. It was like this. I had lost the book, and could not find it anywhere, and you would not give me any lessons until I had found it. All this I told to his Highness, when he asked me why I was absent from school. And my mother, who was present, said to me, 'You have told the truth, but the Sáhib will not teach you, until you have found the book. The truth has served you ill, beyond a doubt. Now, if you would say that you had destroyed the book, the Sáhib might give you the sticks, perhaps, but he would certainly give you your lessons.' And his Highness said, 'By my eyes, it would be wise to take your mother's advice.' And I replied, saying, 'But the Sáhib likes me to tell the truth. Since the book is not destroyed, he might find it. Would it be wise, therefore, to say that I had torn it in pieces ?' And this I said on the second day. And his Highness said to me, 'Are you telling the truth now ?' And I said, 'Yes ; may I be your sacrifice !' And his Highness said, 'I hope you will find the book soon.' But I could not find it, try as I would. And then, on the third day, all the ladies of the *andarún* said to me, 'Why don't

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you tell the Sáhib that you destroyed the book? You must be a very silly boy to persevere in the truth when it serves you so ill. Be wiser to-morrow than you have been to-day.' And so I came to you next morning and told you the lie. I was sad then, and I am sorry now."

There was a pause, and a silence so deep that one could hear Akbar's heart beating, like a clock.

Said Bahrám Mírzá, "I wonder what the Sáhib will do. It is a very interesting situation."

"Akbar Mírzá is not so much to blame as the women—is he, mosie mon ami?" said Humáyún Mírzá.

"And the Sáhib cannot give *them* the sticks," Ferídún Mírzá added.

"Silence, boys. Let me think;" and so saying, I struck a match.

"He is going to smoke," Humáyún Mírzá whispered. His voice was pitched in the key of a Gregorian chant.

He was right. When I had finished my pipe, I unburdened my complete reflection in the matter by saying—

"There is no thoroughfare; the incident is closed; *und damit Punktum*." Perhaps some sage will acquaint the simple with what I ought to have done.

"The Sáhib is swearing," said Ferídún Mírzá, at a venture.

"No, he is not, thou ass!" cried Bahrám Mírzá.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE ZILLU'S-SULTÁN'S VISIT TO THE SHAH'S COURT

In the last fifteen years the Zillu's-Sultán has paid not more than a couple of visits to the seat of the Central Government in Teherán, and it is with those two visits that this chapter deals. Of these, the first, which took place in his father's reign, saw him fall, in the month of February, 1888, from the height of his all but independent control over two-fifths of the whole of Persia ; while the second, occurring, as it did, two years after the accession of Mozufferu'd-Dín Sháh, might be said to be the Zill's private recognition of his younger brother as his sovereign lord. His father, Naṣiru'd-Dín Sháh, had been assassinated on the 1st of May, 1896, and when that happened the Zill made his bow to the inevitable by sending his brother, the Valí-'ahd, a present of 400,000 túmáns to defray his expenses from Tabriz to Teherán, together with a congratulatory telegram, in verse, which ran as follows :—

“To laugh—to weep, I know not which to do :  
The sea recedes ; the pearl lies bare to you.”

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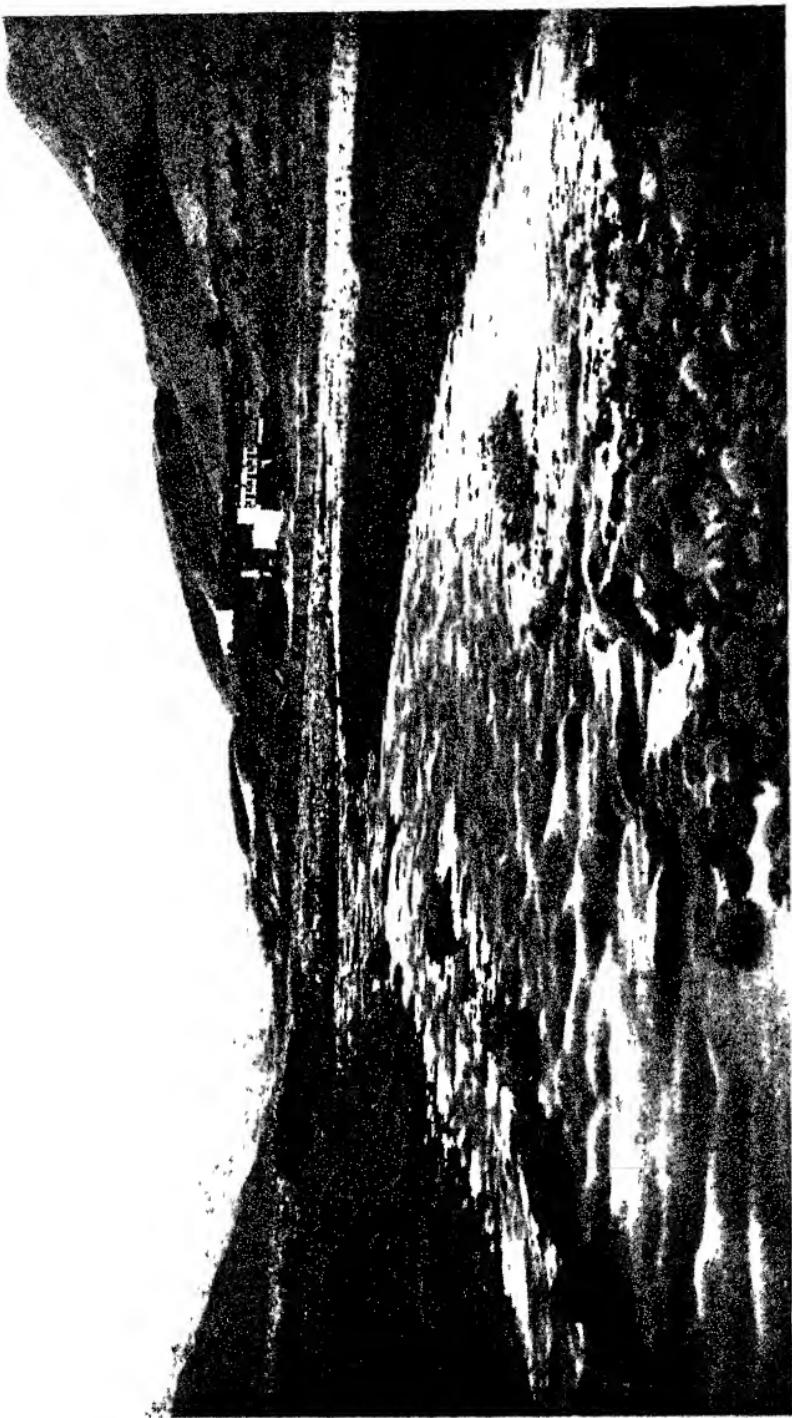
Two years later, on the 2nd of May, 1898, very early in the morning, the Zillu's-Sultán set out on his second journey to the capital, his favourite son, Akbar Mírzá, accompanying him as far as Gameshláw. This custom of setting the traveller on his way, which is regarded as an act of friendship, is called *badraka*; while the ceremony of going out to meet a new arrival, a more formal undertaking, is called *istikbál*. Akbar Mírzá, who had taken French leave of me upon his *badraka*, met with an *istikbál* on the threshold of the class-room, which was little to his liking.

"You are the master!" he cried. "Please to pardon me, monsieur, and I will tell you a new and true story of his Highness."

Artful dodger! and to stay my hand at the second stroke, too!

Akbar Mírzá cut a wry face when he sat down; then, having gained his point through my cordial co-operation with his tactics, he told me the following episode of his father:—

A few days before his departure, the Zillu's-Sultán, who was then in camp at Gameshláw, having disguised himself in the dress of a Persian *naukar*, mounted his horse, and pricked it over a plain, where the vegetation grew as scant as hair in leprosy, at a breathless gallop. Nor did he draw rein until he had reached the foot of a flame-red mountain, where a shepherd, old and loquacious, was watching his flock.



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The customary greeting over, there was silence for a spell.

"There is a rumour abroad," said the Prince at last, "that his Imperial Highness, Zillu's-Sultán, has been summoned to Teherán by his brother, the Sháh."

The words were toned to an inquiry, but the shepherd, turning a wary eye upon the horseman, made a guarded reply.

"How should I know when you, a *naukar* of his Highness, are in doubt!" said he.

"By the ambrosial beard of Fath-'Ali Sháh!" cried the Zill, laughing, "I am not a *naukar* of the Zillu's-Sultán, nor was I ever in his service. That I am acquainted with the Prince, is true, and——"

"I beg leave to state for your service," interrupted the shepherd, "that I made a mistake. If you were our Prince's *naukar*, he would tie that tongue of yours with the camel-tie to keep it from trespassing upon his forbearance."

"Tell me," replied the Zill, smiling, "by my soul! by the king's salt! tell me, how often you have seen this Prince of yours?"

"I have seen him as often as there are days in the year; I saw him in his power and glory—the wolves had a hunter then, and the sheep a shepherd, for our Prince—may his family increase and his offspring prosper!—held all the evil-doers of central and southern Irán within his grasp, and even the Soldúz he kept from pillaging. Yes; I saw him

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on his way to Teherán, ten years ago ; his *taleh* [luck] was bad then ; but now, upon his second visit, his star shall be more fortunate ; for it is written in the book of Fate that our Prince shall reign over us in Irán."

"I would not weary you with too many questions," replied the Zillu's-Sultán, smiling a broad ironic smile, "lest you should bridle my tongue with the camel-tie to keep it from trespassing upon your forbearance ; nevertheless, since it should lie within the limits of your mercy and goodness to possess your soul in patience——"

"Do not coin your words so fast, friend !" cried the shepherd. "Was not the book of Fate revealed to me last night as I lay asleep on the mountain-top ? Did not I see the book wide open upon my knees, and the finger of God, did it not point to the passage wherein the destiny of our Prince was set forth in plain, bold Persian *naskh*?"—a legible writing, much used in transcribing books.

The Zillu's-Sultán smiled his broad ironic smile. "If the book had been written in *shikastah*,"—a rapid shorthand, employed in letter-writing—said he, "the worldly destiny of your Prince might have been closed to the intelligence of everybody except an angel. But, praise be to Allâh who dictated the words in Persian, and to the heavenly *mirzâ* who framed them in *naskh*, I shall now share with you and the angelic hosts the secret of your Prince's future career. You have my permission to speak :

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continue your story, and beware lest you utter the thing that is not, for the power of making you tell the truth is mine."

The last words, uttered in a brazen tone of command, gave the shepherd pause, and laid his pride prostrate.

"By the salt of his Highness," he cried, in a voice of whispering humbleness, "by your life, and by the beard of the Prophet, the words, your Excellency, were these: 'Thus doth the mighty, the wise God, reveal his will unto thee, that thou mayest gladden the heart of his servant, the Zillu's-Sultán. It wanteth little but that the heavens of the Prince's destiny be rent in sunder from above, at the dawn of his coming majesty. God leadeth whom he pleaseth into his mercy, and it shall come to pass that God will lead the Zillu's-Sultán to the throne of his fathers'—and may I eat dirt if I speak not the truth.'

The Zillu's-Sultán fell into a muse, and, when he spoke again, it was to swear by his own life that the Prince, his friend, desired nothing less than the fulfilment of so high a destiny.

The shepherd scoffed the assurance to scorn, saying—

"If I know anything of our Prince and his ambitious spirit, he will have cause to change his mind upon his arrival at his brother's Court!"

"How so?"

"What! have not you lived long enough in the

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world to have heard the story of the Zillu's-Sultán and his younger brother's handkerchief? The story will prove my words to be true, O Friend of the Prince, so lend ear to it, and advise his Highness accordingly. Know, then, that his late Majesty, Náṣiru'd-Dín Sháh—may Alláh burn his assassin for ever in hell-fire!—was talking one day to his two sons, and the question arose as to which should stand at his right hand: our Prince, the Zillu's-Sultán, who was the first-born, or Mozufferu'd-Dín Mírzá, who was the Crown-Prince. And it came to pass, in the heat of the dispute, that Mozufferu'd-Dín Mírzá, being about to wipe his nose, dropped his handkerchief, and it fell at the feet of Zillu's-Sultán. Then his Majesty Náṣiru'd-Dín Sháh, who loved a joke better than much fine gold, said to his best-beloved first-born, ‘Pick up the handkerchief and give it to Mozufferu'd-Dín Mírzá,’ and that he said in order that he might test the spirit of our little Prince, who would not dare to disobey him. What should our little Prince do? If he picked up the handkerchief, he would bend his back to his younger brother. If he disobeyed the Sháh, he would get the sticks——”

Here the shepherd, having reached the climax of the story, took out his pipe, and fell to smoking in a stony silence.

“Go on—go on!” said the Zillu's-Sultán, laughing.

“If you think I am likely to throw away the

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story for nothing, your wit is even less ready than your cash !” the shepherd said, puffing stolidly at his pipe.

The Prince, hailing the repartee with a good-humoured laugh, greased the shepherd’s tongue with a *túmán*, for which the latter repaid him with kind thanks and the end of the story.

“ Yes ; a third course was open to the quick-witted,” he resumed ; “ and wisdom is better than wealth. What our little Prince did was simple. He flung back his head, stood bolt-upright, and drew his sword. ‘ Here is your pocket-handkerchief on the point of the blade !’ he said proudly. ‘ It will serve as a bandage if you should cut your finger in taking it off !’ From this it is plain, your Excellency, that our Prince would rather accept the crown from his younger brother than bend his back to him in a lowly *seldám* ; and if the worst befall, then will I do for our Prince what Gaveh did for Ferídún ! ”

“ By the standard of the great blacksmith ! ” the Zillu's-Sultán exclaimed in a voice of thunder, “ your tongue shall be torn from your deceitful mouth, that you may learn that I allow neither strife nor treason in my provinces ; and that done, I will send you back to the master who pays you—liar—traitor—spy ! ”

“ Má-sha'lláh ! ” (“ Praise Alláh ! ”) gasped the shepherd in a voice of unfeigned amazement, then fell upon his knees and bowed his forehead to the dust. “ Our Prince ! his Highness ! I have seen

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our Prince at last ! My ear is in your hand ; I shall die happy, having seen you ! I am a liar, it is true ; but, by the head of your Highness ! I am not a traitor, and may my mother burn in hell for ever if I be a spy ! ”

Then the Zillu’s-Sultán burst into a roar of laughter, and said—

“ Truly, my friend, you can say now, with a clear conscience, that you have seen your Prince. Go in peace, and may Alláh chasten you from lying.” And with these words the Zillu’s-Sultán returned at full speed to his camp at Gameshláw.

\* \* \* \* \*

“ Mosie mon ami,” said Humáyún Mírzá, as soon as Akbár Mírzá had finished the story ; “ tell me, by your life, why his Highness is not Sháh.”

“ The Sháh of Persia, being a Kájár,” I replied, “ must be of royal birth on his mother’s side.”

“ And the mother of his Highness, was she not a princess of the House of Kájár, Sáhib ? ” asked Ferídún Mírzá.

“ No ; she was the daughter of a *gholám* in the service of Násiru’d-Dín Sháh’s uncle.”

“ *My* mother is a princess,” remarked Ferídún.

“ I suppose you flatter yourself that you would be Valí’-ahd if his Highness were Sháh ? ”

Bahrám Mírzá’s voice was one of frigid inquiry. He eyed his half-brother meditatively through half-closed eyelids. Ferídún’s composure was a match for this lofty contempt.

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"I don't flatter myself," he replied, calmly ; "but I should certainly be the Valí-'ahd, if his Highness were King."

Akbar Mírzá burst into a ringing laugh. "Well, . . . I don't care a rap who my grandmother was," said he. "I only know that I am proud to be my father's son."

"And so am I," Bahrám Mírzá acquiesced, raising none the less a supercilious eyebrow, as much as to say, "You are not the only one, my friend." Then he turned to me, and related the main facts in the Zillu's-Sultán's career.

Now, when his Highness was at the zenith of his powers, he collected a great army that was well-drilled, admirably equipped, and regularly paid, and this he did to support the Government in all good works. Was not he the King's son and his faithful subject ? And the tribesmen of the western provinces, do they not belong to the fiercest and most turbulent tribes in Persia ? And since such is the undeniable fact, was it not his bounden duty, in the interests of peace, and as an evidence of his governing ability, to form such an army as should intimidate those unruly subjects ? The political situation would seem to have amply justified the Zillu's-Sultán's policy. If his father, the Sháh, trusted him not, why had he made his "well-beloved firstborn" the ruler over so many provinces ? The truth is that the Sháh trusted him in the beginning, and would have trusted him until the end, only there were two

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men in Teherán who watched the growth of his army under Austrian officers with jealous eyes. The first was the Zill's enemy at Court, the Aminu's-Sultán, the most powerful statesman in Persia ; the second was the Russian minister, who, striving, as he was, to hasten the decadence of the kingdom, was anything but pleased to see so many trained troops in that part of it, which might be said to lie within the British sphere of influence. And so it came to pass that these two men, the one working to overthrow the Zill, and the other to quicken the aims of Russia, succeeded at last in arousing the suspicions of the Sháh, who sent an officer to Isfahán in order to report upon the army which his Highness had formed there. Nothing could be more self-evident than this : If the Zill had been a traitor to the King, he would have done one of two things—either he would have set his father at defiance, or he would have concealed from the officer the full strength of his military power. The Zill did neither the one nor the other. Had he drawn his sword he would have proved himself the master of the situation, and strengthened our prestige in the South ; but being a loyal subject, and having nothing to conceal from his sovereign, whose representative he was, he held a review of his troops, and treated the Government official with the best marks of hospitality and friendship. The latter, on his return to the capital, contrived to excite the Sháh's jealousy by insinuating that the Zill was all-powerful in his provinces, a

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king by the right of the sword. The disbanding of his son's army was the Sháh's shortsighted action on hearing the report. That being done, the Zill set out for Teherán, and threw himself at his father's feet, saying, "What evil have I done, O my father, that you should turn away the light of your countenance from me? Am not I your well-beloved firstborn, and your faithful subject?" But the Sháh, hardening his heart, would not listen to reason, and his son was constrained to tender his resignation of all the provinces under his rule save that of Isfahán. Two or three years later, some of these were restored to him; but the breaking up of his troops, all things considered, was a blunder it would be impossible to exaggerate. It broke the back of the Zill's sturdy patriotism, and tore the heart out of the Persian army. The Zill, from being the most generous and public-spirited prince in Persia, lives nowadays with no more inspiriting an ambition than to amass money; and the army, free from his guiding hand, has sunk to the condition of a rabble of spiritless ragamuffins, sans head, sans heart, sans arms, sans discipline—the finest material in the world running to rust from the want of a directing mind and a liberal-fisted patron.

Said Bahrám Mírzá: "Sáhib, why did not the Queen, who made my father a Grand Commander of the Star of India in the days of his power, come to his support in the hour of his need? Is not my father a faithful friend of the Queen of England?

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and are not his enemies hers, and her enemies his ? Is not my father right to be on the English side ? and since he was, and is, why is it that England turned her back upon him ten years ago ? ”

And Echo answers, “ Why ? ”

“ You ask far too many questions, mon frère,” said Ferídún Mírzá. “ Monsieur is not interested in the past, nor are we. The past is dead. We live in the present, and our hopes are cast in this the second journey of his Highness to Teherán—not in the visit of ten years ago ; we all know how that ended. What I should like to know is this : Will the Sháh, his brother, be kinder to his Highness than was his father, the Sháh ? and, if so, what new dignity and honour will be conferred upon him ? These are the questions that lie near to my heart.”

“ Possess your heart in patience, then,” I replied.

“ Well, the life of his Highness is safe for another month, thanks be to God,” cried Ferídún Mírzá ; “ for did he not kill the fatted sheep on the first day of the moon, and give the flesh thereof to the poor and hungry ? So his life will be in no danger until the new moon shows herself like a dagger in the sky, as if to warn his Highness to offer another sheep as a sacrifice to Fate. . . . On the first day of the month, have we not seen the fatted sheep led forth into the garden of the Díván-kháné, to be patted on the head by his Highness, ere it fell to the butcher’s knife ? ”

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"I can't deny it, my boy."

"Then why do you smile, sair? Is not his Highness alive and in good health? And since all is well with his Highness, is it not prudent and wise that he should continue to propitiate Alláh by making the needy a monthly present of a fatted sheep? Shall not the Compassionate One protect him that feeds the hungry and succours the weak?"

"*In-sha'lláh!*" I replied.

Bahrám Mírzá glanced down at his silver armlet, his tight little mouth half-opening on a snug smile of security; then he raised his eyes to mine.

"Sáhib," said he, "is it prudent to be wiser than experience?"

"Oh Aflátún [Plato]," I replied: "it is wise to learn prudence from experience, beyond a doubt."

"Precisely, Sáhib. That is why I wear this," and he touched his armlet that contained a text out of the Kur'án as a preservative of health.

"This is foolish talk," said Humáyún, yawning. "Let us return to his Highness."

"Yes; what do you think that the Sháh will give to his Highness, monsieur?" asked Ferídún. But that was a question that it entered not in my head to answer, although I was in an alien land.

Many days wore away; then came the news that his Highness had reached the town of Kum, and that he had called upon his (alleged) enemy, the Aminu's-Sultán, and made his peace with him. And then, again, after many days, we heard of the Prince's

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arrival at his brother's Court, and of the gracious reception that he met with there.

" You are my heart, and I am your soul," his Majesty is reported to have said to his elder brother, " and therefore it behoves us to work together, heart and soul, for the progress and welfare of our beloved country."

Gracious words are wise—may they bring forth fruit in due season !

And at last came rumours of promotion, setting every tongue in the bazaars on the wag—a subdued murmur rising, as the reports grew more and more conflicting, to a ceaseless buzz as of a myriad drones on the hum. The King was dead—had died long ago ; his ministers had kept his death secret, awaiting the arrival of the brother who was to succeed him. The King was alive and in the best of health—had never known a day's sickness since he ascended the throne of his father. The King, though alive, was a martyr to all the diseases that flesh is heir to, and was about to abdicate in favour of his elder brother. The Zillu's-Sultán had been proclaimed Sháh of Persia, his brother being long dead. The Zillu's-Sultán, having closed his brother's eyes in death, would be proclaimed King on the morrow. The Sháh was going to Europe forthwith in order to consult the best physicians there, and the Zillu's-Sultán was to take up his abode in Teherán as Prince Regent. The Sháh was not going to Europe, having no need to consult the physicians there ; and the

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Zillu's-Sultán, while he would retain the governorship of Isfahán, had been commanded to proceed at once to Meshed as Governor-General of the province. There was no question of the Zillu's-Sultán's leaving the seat of the Central Government, because his Majesty was about to confer upon him the dignity of the First Minister of State. The Zillu's-Sultán, having waved the privilege of the premiership out of friendship for the Aminu's-Sultán, had been promoted to the rank of Commander-in-Chief of his Majesty's forces. The Sháh of Persia, loth as he was to cut himself off from the influence of a brother whose military genius was of a piece with his statesman-like mind, had brought himself, in the interests of his southern dominions, to say good-bye to the Zillu's-Sultán, who would return at once to Isfahán, as Governor-General of Irak, Luristán, Isfahán, and Fars. And in this, the last report of all, there was a grain of truth, for it was not long before the Zillu's-Sultán came back to us again, not as Governor-General of all the provinces aforesaid, truly, but as the ruler of the self-same territory he had held prior to the visit. In fact, the outward and visible signs in him of his sovereign's favour were nothing more nor less than an added dignity of demeanour, and a more haughty bearing, and a new look of hope and confidence in the ultimate realization of his heart's desire.

Meanwhile, the price of bread, in his absence, had gone up to famine price. The women-folk,

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fearing that that would be the result, had bearded him in the Díván-Kháné on the eve of his departure, as I have already related ; and these same women waylaid him on his return, surrounding his coach, and refusing to allow him to pursue his way until he had promised to relieve them from the clutch of starvation. It was said, and I believe the report to have been true, that they warned him by his father's assassination, that the foot of justice was swift to overtake the unrighteous ruler—a covert threat which had the effect of reducing the Prince to reason. However, when I saw him next morning, the light of his countenance showed his self-complacency to have suffered no limit from the encounter with the belligerent sex. He was on the best of terms with himself.

"How old should you judge me to be ?" he said to me, in the course of our interview.

"Your Highness," I replied, "has the vigorous appearance of a man of thirty-eight." I was speaking in 1898, remember.

"Sáhib, I am more than ten years older than that."

"Impossible !" I cried.

The Zill, assuming the port of the King of kings and Lord of lords, rose to his feet, and reached out for my hand.

"Sáhib," he almost chanted, "Násiru'd-Dín Sháh's eldest son never lies, nor does the elder brother of Mozufferu'd-Dín Sháh. My word, as

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that of the son of one king and the brother of another, is, believe me, unimpeachable."

Decidedly the Zill, though he was not then so influential a factor in the political situation as he had been some fifteen years before, must have gained the end of his journey in more senses than one: so much, if not more, was abundantly clear from his assumption of an almost kingly aloofness on his return from Teherán. His reference to his two august relatives suggested a parallel and a contrast. Unlike his brother the Sháh, who will pore over old manuscripts for hours, lying flat on his back, the Zill is not a reader of books, his attitude towards literature being that of a listener whose appreciation is apt to be overcome by sleep. He is rather a student of men, whose secret thoughts he has learned to read with terrifying accuracy. The one is a man of thought, the other a man of action. *Per contra*, the likeness between Násiru'd-Dín Sháh and the Zillu's-Sultán is closely marked. The truth of the proverb, "Like father, like son," was never more triumphantly vindicated than in their salient characteristics. The father was shrewd, inquisitive, brusque; so is the Zill. The son has a passion for European politics, and an incurable love of a joke; so had his father. Násiru'd-Dín Sháh's sense of humour was only equalled by his childlike love of novelty; and the Zillu's-Sultán's craze for anything that is new is excelled by nothing in him except by his disposition for jocularity. Both the father and the son, moreover,

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may be said to join hands in the determination of their hearts and minds to sport and sovereignty. It is only in their manner of expressing themselves that the two men stand out in a bold contrast. The father spoke in short, incisive sentences. The Zill pours out his eloquence in a flood of words. Thus, in the exuberance of his suckling hopes, he went on to speak to me of Sir Mortimer Durand in words of unbounded admiration. The victories of Nadir Sháh, the Napoleon of the East, paled their ineffectual fires before the all-conquering spirit of her late Majesty's Minister Plenipotentiary ; Ferídún Sháh was not so just, nor was Sháh 'Abbás so liberal, as Queen Victoria's representative at his brother's Court ; and as for Rustum, the Persian Hercules—bah ! was he not a weakling in comparison with the tower of strength at the British Legation ? Despite the hyperbolic enthusiasm of his partisanship, there can be no doubt that the Zillu's-Sultán loves nothing so much as a fine figure of a man : a stranger of thews and sinews is bound to find favour in his sight ; but if the stranger should kick the beam in the scale of the Prince's expectation of mere bulk, it will be all over with him, unless he make amends for his humble stature by some startling novelty in dress. In dealing with this side of the Zillu's-Sultán's character, I might add another chapter to "Sartor Resartus" without exhausting the reader's patience, but two episodes shall serve to point the trait in these pages. For instance—

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One afternoon—it was a post-day, I remember—I was walking across the flowery compound of the Diván-Kháné on my way to the school-room, when I heard the rasping voice of the Zillu's-Sultán calling out to me from the other end of the compound. The sun shining in my eyes had prevented me from seeing him. Shading my eyes with my hand, I stopped dead, then doffed my cap of crocodile's leather, which had been the amazement of all beholders in Russia.

"Excellency," sang out the Zillu's-Sultán, "venez ici!"

I obeyed. The Prince was sitting beside the fountain on the daïs, surrounded as usual by a crowd of obsequious courtiers. Among them was the English-speaking *mirzâ* of the Imperial Bank of Persia, and he acted as my interpreter later on. The first thing his Highness did was to show me a sporting rifle, a beautiful weapon, which had just arrived from England.

"Who made this rifle?" he cried, holding it out at arm's length.

I told the *mirzâ* that the name of the maker would be found on the barrel; after which the Zill, who is nothing if not voluble in speech and sudden in his actions, rushed to a bundle of papers that had come by post, and singled out a copy of *Punch*. The cartoon for the week represented a native officer standing in a protecting attitude over the body of an English officer who was wounded.

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“Anglais !” roared the Zillu’s-Sultán in a derisive tone, dabbing a plump brown forefinger on the prostrate form. “Indien !” he almost yelled, in a voice of triumph, caressing the stalwart outlines of the native officer with a lingering hand.

“Après ?” I replied, not a little nettled.

The Zill cast a furtive look in my direction. “What was that ?” he said.

I turned to the *mirzâ* at my elbow. “Tell his Highness I said, ‘What next ?’”

The Zill gave me another sidelong glance. “Anglais bas !” he cried, as who should say, “Praise be to Allâh, who is merciful and just to rid us of our enemies ;” then in a voice rising to a shout of thanksgiving, he caused me to burst from my reserve by yelling, “Indien haut !”

“Not a bit of it !” I cried. “Tell his Highness that he misses the point. The ‘Indien’ is not, as he would have me believe, an Afriti victorious in the battle, but one of our native Muhammadan officers, ready and willing, if needs be, to sacrifice his life for his English comrade. Why, bless my soul, that picture is a tribute to the loyalty of our native officers, who, although they are fighting against their co-religionists, rush to the front when the English officers are shot down, and lead their men to victory over their friends—the enemy. I ask his Highness to judge from this, with what magnificent bravery our native troops would fight against an enemy of an alien race !”



THE ZILLU'S-SULTAN AS MARKSMAN



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These words being interpreted to the Zillu's-Sultán, he covered his discomfiture by bursting into a roar of laughter so unusually loud that the young princes appeared at the window of the class-room above.

"Do you think I didn't know that!" he cried; after which, his humour leading him to fresh fields and pastures green, he rose to his feet, strutted alongside of me, and fell to making a digital examination of my cap and white riding-breeches, of my snowy Norfolk jacket, and new brown top-boots. The first and the last achieved an easy conquest, and crowned my reputation for energy and tutorial wisdom.

"Pa-pa-pa-pa-pa!" he chuckled, in a tone of admiration too deep for words. "Très joli—très! portez toujours!" And thenceforward, until his passion for novelty overruled the fleeting impulse, I was doomed to take my walks abroad in top-boots and spurs; nor did I ever appear before him in a new suit of clothes but he would raise his too-strident voice in commendation of what, in the recollection of his full-blown verbosity, I can only call the encyclopedian attainments of his tutor *şáhib*. On such occasions, indeed, it could scarce be said of Solomon in all his wisdom that he was endowed like the spiritual father of the Zillu's-Sultán's sons.

The second episode is even more characteristic of the trait which shows the Zill to be at heart but the oldest child of the House of Kájár, and that episode I will now proceed to relate.

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Upon the visit of the Governor-General of Shiráz and Fars to the Zill's Court, Bahrám Mírzá said to me one morning—

“His Highness has requested me to tell you, monsieur, that the Governor of Shiráz, who is a big person, will examine us this afternoon, and his Highness would be much pleased if you would honour his Excellency by wearing your best suit of clothes—your very best, monsieur ; something black and severe ; something new and fashionable ; such a suit, for instance, as you would wear in the afternoon in England upon the occasion of a ceremonious visit.”

When I had reached the Armenian and European colony of Julfá, where I was then in residence, and had changed my clothes, I drove back to the Palace of Forty Pillars, *via* the desert and the byways, lest the passers-by should take fright at the hideous garb of civilized London “Town.” My own East ! land of the flowing *'abd* and fascinating turban, be merciful to me, a transgressor against the laws of good taste, in that I cast the shadow of a top hat amid the haunts of thy brooding spirit ! As my fate would have it, I chanced to meet a European on the road, and he, opening his eyes wide to the blatant horror of my headgear, burst into a fit of laughter. I apologized, meekly enough, for the enormity of my sin, then drove on my way, dejected ; to ride I had been ashamed. But when the Zillu's-Sultán entered the class-room, and his observant eyes

## Zillu's-Sultán visits the Sháh's Court

took in every detail in the amazing transformation, I knew at a glance that I had no need to apologize to him. Even before he had seen the hat, which I had concealed under my chair, his beaming face, casting its smiles round about me, said as plain as a whisper in my ear, “Ma-sha’lláh, behold a man of genius !” This tribute to my appearance, glorious as it might be, was far from crowning my triumph. It fell short of the full bloom of admiration by the gloss on my silk hat. Nor was it until he had discovered the whereabouts of the heinous thing that his voiceless surrender to my overmastering gifts grew articulate from sheer adulation. Rising to his feet, he cast about my ears the flowers of Persian rhetoric, approaching at every compliment one step nearer to his victim. I should blush even now if I were to raise the veil from the manifold attributes of greatness that his Highness was pleased to discern beneath the surface of my frock-coat. It will be enough to say that they were of such sort as to win from him the assurance that his gratitude for my services, deep as it was, sought in vain an adequate token of his appreciation. He would prostrate himself in the dust or ever I should go unrewarded, and would take the first opportunity of asking his Majesty the King of kings to confer upon me the order of the Lion and the Sun. Then was the West glorified ? Alas ! no, gentle reader ! It was enregistered on the Roll of Fate that the East should rise triumphant in the end. No sooner had the Zill

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exhausted one source of eloquence than he caught sight of another, otherwise inspiring, namely, my glittering watch-guard. A new light leaped to his eye. The yellow splendour of the glistening thing held him spellbound. The impotence of speech tied his tongue. Only his eyes spoke. They craved the reassuring evidence of the touch. His hand, under the instinctive guidance of the enraptured eye, reached out swiftly to the chain, and held it tight.

“*Zar-i-khális ast?*” (“Is it pure gold?”) said the Zillu’s-Sultán, in an awestruck whisper. The chain weighed heavy in his clutch.

“We must not look a gift horse in the mouth, may it please your Highness,” I replied. “The chain was given to me by Ferídún Mírzá.”

“*Wháh!*” cried the Zill; and his tone was designed to overwhelm me with the sense of my untrustworthiness. “Then all I can say is that it is not gold!” And, so saying, he turned on his heel, and paced with majestic solemnity to the door. Never should the Order of the Lion and the Sun glisten on the breast of so deceitful a servant! So much, at least, was plain from the reproachful glance he cast upon me from the threshold.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE CAT ON THE FOOTSTOOL

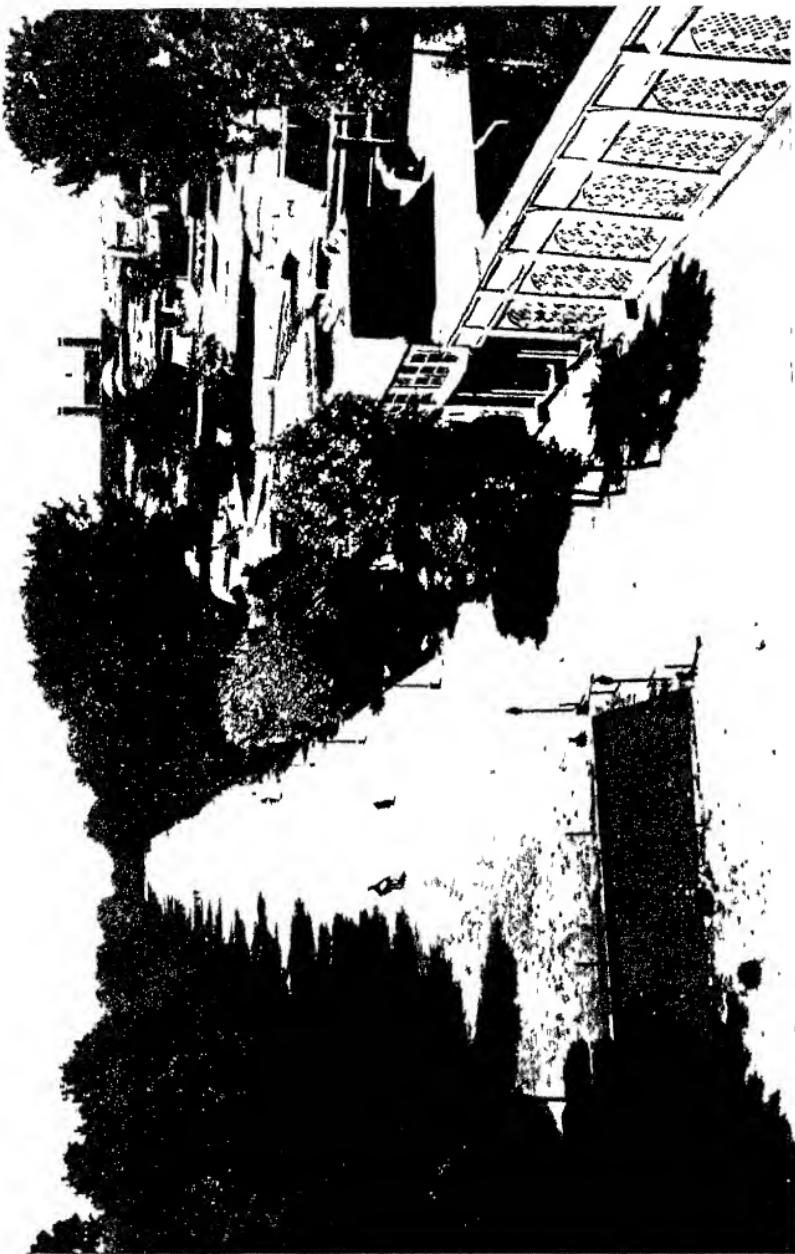
IT is a helpful plan, before starting on a journey to foreign parts, to form a clear notion as to the mere outlines of the country that it is our intention to visit. Certain lands we know so well that the name is enough to call up the pictures of them as they stand out boldly in the atlas. This is especially true of islands and peninsulas. Mention the word England, for instance, and up starts the map, a triangle whose base swims so securely in the treacherous waters of the Channel as to have gained for our country the title of "Perfide Albion"; while the coast-lines of Italy, who once rode triumphant over the western continent, jump to the mind's eye at the mere sight of a top-boot. But easy as it is to picture to ourselves the shape of a waterbound Power, it often taxes our ingenuity to trace, in the frontier lines of an inland country, a likeness to anything in the air, or on the earth, or in the waters under the earth. Perhaps the most bewildering map of all in the regard we are considering is the

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map of the Russian Empire. Our perplexity as to where Russia begins, together with our uncertainty as to where she comes to an end, clamours almost daily for the publication of a revised and official map of her dominions ; and so we close the atlas with a bang, sticking fast to our old-time conception of the Colossus, as symbolized by a Polar bear hugging herself on an iceberg.

Our first look at the map of the Sháh's domains yields but scant encouragement for us to persevere in our quest ; but, if we paint the map red, and fix our attention on the province of Azerbiján, in the extreme left top corner, we are rewarded by a result as unexpected as it is appropriate : Persia stands revealed as a Persian cat, crouching in an uneasy attitude on a footstool—the coast-line of the Persian Gulf—her fury coat on end with perplexity. The fitness of the likeness is undeniable, for if Persia is famous for anything, save carpets, in European minds, she is famous for cats. But we carry our contention farther than that. We are prepared to show that the similitude loses nothing of its aptness when applied to Persia's attitude towards the Powers that rough-hew her progress.

First we will study the province of Azerbiján in the north-west—that is, the cat's head. The neck, which runs along the coast, begins near Dakka on the Caspian Sea. From Astara, the most northern seaport in Persia, the frontier line, following the north-westerly direction of the mountains thereabouts,



THE CITY OF KAZVIN, A FORMER CAPITAL OF PERSIA



## The Cat on the Footstool

strikes inland to Liangan, thus forming the right side of the cat's head. The right ear, the plain of Mogan, and the left ear, the country between Mount Ararat in the north and the Urumiah Lake below, are pricked attentively, as everybody with an eye in his head can see for himself. From the tip of the left ear, Mount Ararat, we follow the frontier southward to a point in the mountains around Kurdistán, hard by the source of the Diala River. The exact spot is Wuvalan. The outline of the cat's head and neck, to the left and right, is now complete. Let us study the province more attentively.

The general aspect of the picture is unmistakably that of a cat's head seen from the rear, but, taking Persia as a whole to represent a cat, Azerbiján would be perhaps more worthy to figure as the claws than the headpiece. For while the city of Tabriz is the centre of a thriving trade, the province, wherein it lies, is the happy hunting-ground for the recruits of the Persian army. Furthermore, the cat, though she is crouching on a footstool, has every appearance of being wide awake. Notice the poise of her head towards the realms of the bear, whose hug of perfect peace she would fain elude. Maybe she is thinking, poor pussy, of the sovereignty of the Caspian Sea, which was ceded to Russia by the Treaty of Gulistán in 1813, Muhammad Sháh relinquishing his claim to it at the advice of his Prime Minister, Hájí Mírzá Akásí, who had remarked, "We are not water-fowl that we should stand in need of salt water; nor

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would it do, for the sake of a handful of it, to embitter the sweet palate of a friend." Or perhaps she is wondering what will be the ultimate effect upon her independence of the new Russian road from the Caspian *via* Kazvin to the capital. Is it inevitable, she ponders, that Russia will advance a step nearer her end so soon as the agreement to shut out railways shall be open to diplomatic discussion once more. She demands nothing better than to grow rich and prosperous ; but a railway in the north alone, while it would develop her resources, would draw Russia much too near for her comfort and security. She is sore perplexed, poor hunted creature, and wishes in her heart that her paws—the province of Arabistán, through which flows the Karun River, the Yangtse of Persia—paralyzed from being tucked up under her, were both free and in a better position to protect her head. All she can do in the circumstances is to await events, and this she does, cocking an affrighted back the while from the Atrek River, flowing into the Caspian Sea, over Mount Tagareff, down to the Argand Hills.

And we of Great Britain, who hold sway over Persian waters in the south, shall we do nothing, when comes the pinch of need, to aid the cat to keep her balance on the footstool. Let her arched back relax under the burden of Russian pressure in the north, and where shall we be? Russia, for all her bureaucratic rescripts, is nothing if not enterprising in the Near East, and her diplomatic successes

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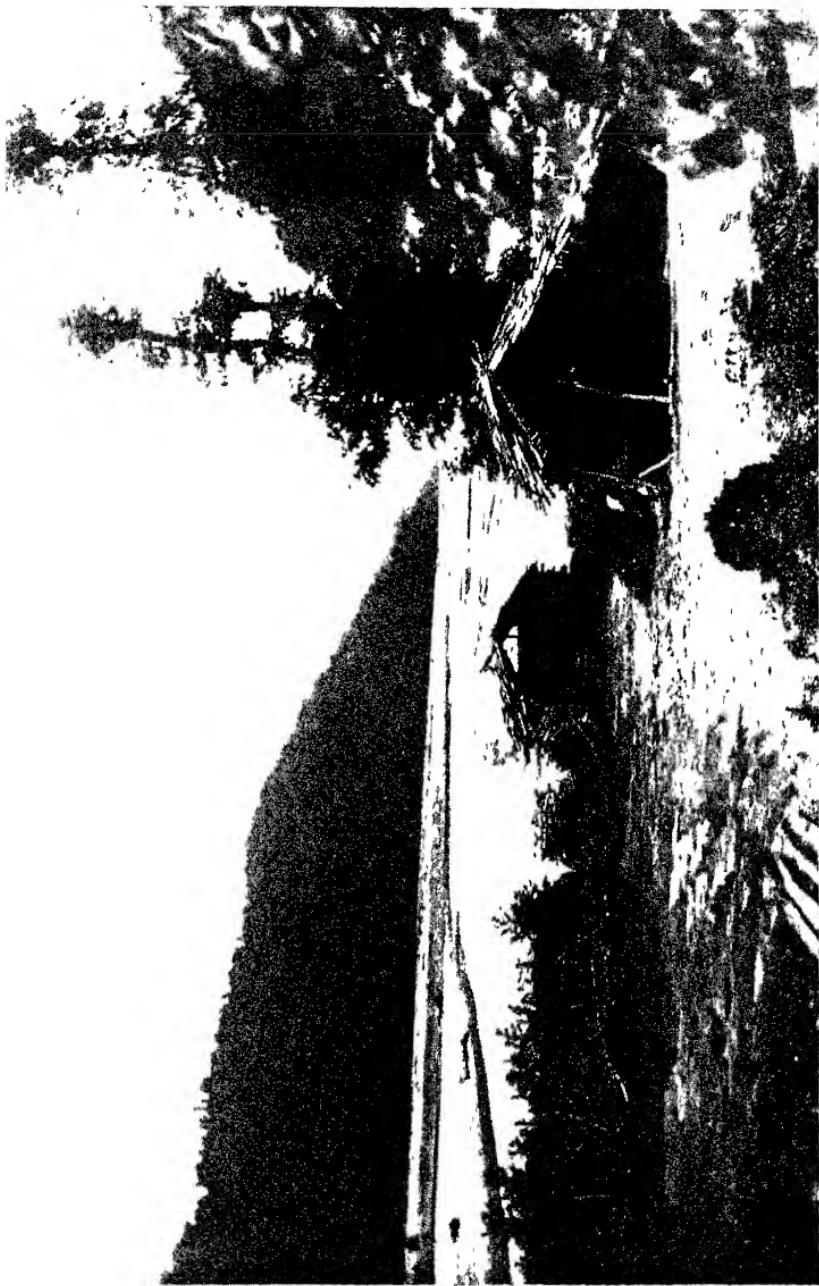
in the past five years show our prestige to be on the wane. It is important that we should grapple energetically with the difficulty of coping with Russian commercial enterprise in the north ; and it is even more important that Persia should be aided to make its Nizam an effective weapon of defence in case of an attack upon the territorial integrity of the country.

Now, you will find it always well, in considering the ebb and flow of British influence in Persia, to make your minds clear as to the diplomatic aims of Russia in the beginning, and to remember that, if Great Britain's star is under an eclipse, the star of Russia must necessarily be in the ascendant. There is yet another and a greater lesson for you to lay to heart. Whereas the Russian policy is to quicken the downfall of Persia, and to penetrate by easy stages to the Persian Gulf, our salvation rather lies both in preserving where we can the independence of the country and in developing its resources. Already the whole of northern Persia, which includes the provinces of Azerbiján, Guilán, Mazanderán, and Khorasán, lies at the mercy of the ice-bound Colossus, who can thus afford to be either patient or aggressive, as may suit his purpose best. For the same reason Russia is in a position, while wreathing her interference with a smile of mock ingenuousness, to put a fence to our diplomatic advances, as was proved a few years ago when the loan that failed was in progress of negotiation. That the Imperial Bank of Persia, a purely

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British undertaking, should hold as security for the loan the control of the Persian customs at Kermansháh and Bushire was construed by the Russian Minister at Teherán into an encroachment upon the sovereign rights of the Sháh. Though the wily diplomat knew that the Sháh's revenue from those sources would double itself under honest management and the revised tariff, he was not the less certain that his Majesty, dreading a like demand from Russia in the north, would be quick to discern the threat underlying his words. The result was that the bank was reluctantly compelled to recall their representatives from Bushire and Kermansháh. Since the collapse of the Tobacco Régie, British diplomacy in Persia had suffered no more humiliating a defeat. Therefore, unless we are prepared to put an end to Russian encroachments by war, it behoves us to stamp the sincerity of our good-will towards Persia with the hall-mark of generosity in our proffers of assistance ; for nothing is more likely to promote the aims of Russia than our being too grasping when we come to the settling of securities. The stigma cast upon our national character by our neighbours *d'outre Manche* was amply confirmed, in the years, 1898, 1899, by Sir Mortimer Durand's unfortunate habit of weighing British prestige by the scruple and selling it by the pound avoirdupois.

Our best security should lie in the success of our policy. The only policy we should pursue is the only policy we can pursue with success and



BY THE BANKS OF THE SEFID RUD, OR WHITE RIVER.



## The Cat on the Footstool

self-respect. To maintain inviolate the central and southern dominions of the Sháh should be the end-all of our aims. To that purpose we should teach the Persians of those regions to put forth their whole strength, and never were they so strong and so prosperous as when the governing responsibility was concentrated in one man, who succeeded, not only in checking the turbulency of the tribesmen, but also in reducing them to military discipline, thus turning the main source of danger into a powerful weapon of security. So, whatever destiny befall the north of Persia, I have undeniable authority for maintaining that no hostile political influence should be tolerated south of a line drawn across the country from Seistán on the east, *via* Kermán and Yezd, to Isfahán in the centre, and prolonged westward to Burujird, Hamadán, and Kermansháh. Now, the districts of which the Zillu's-Sultán was actually the almost independent ruler in 1886 were, as I had occasion to remark in the first chapter, Gulpaigán and Khonsar, Joshagán, Irak, Isfahán, Fars, Yezd, Arabistán, Luristán, Kurdistán, Kangavar, Nihavend, Kamareh, Burujird, Kermansháh, Asadabad, and Kezzaz, and all these provinces are within the above-mentioned boundary of our sphere of influence. I would ask the British Government if they regard the political influence of Prince Dabija, who was appointed the first Russian Consul of Isfahán at the close of the year 1897, as friendly to the interests which Persia and great Britain have in common, and

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if they consider that those interests were best served, in face of the new political factor, by withdrawing Mr. Preece for a period of close upon two years from his consular duties in Isfahán, in order that he might lend his assistance to Her Majesty's legation at Teherán? While I grant that the experience and tact of Mr. J. R. Preece, who is anything but a retail trader in diplomacy, could not but strengthen the hand of the British Minister, if the latter would accept the advice offered, I beg permission to call in question the wisdom of leaving open to the unquestionable intrigues of a powerful rival the culminating point of the British sphere of influence. Prince Dabija is in Isfahán for no other purpose than to undermine our prestige. He might scour the province from end to end without finding a single Russian whose interests it would pay his Government to protect. In the days of the Zillu's-Sultán's power, believe me, Prince Dabija would be now where he was—prior to the year 1897—at Tabriz. The Zill's downfall was Russia's opportunity, and she is making the most of her chances. It will go hard with us to escape the expenses of that Consulate of hers! Yet no sooner was it about to be opened than we scuttled from the field, leaving a busy Armenian doctor to safeguard our interests!

I was at the Zillu's-Sultán's Court from the beginning of July, 1897, to November 3, 1898, and during those sixteen months the British Consulate was what Staffordshire folk would call "void"—a

## The Cat on the Footstool

word which might well be applied to the head that hatched so addled an egg of generalship. It is not my intention to labour this point, but it is only right for the British public to know that for the space of a year the foremost political factor in the heart of our sphere of interest was the Russian Consul, Prince Dabija, and well he knew it too ! From the day of his arrival he took up his abode, not in the Christian colony of Julfā, but in the Muḥammadan stronghold of Isfahán ; nor did he stay, despite the wordy clamour of the *mullás*, to weigh the pros and cons of flying his country's flag. All he did was to wait until a certain *mulla* was in the middle of his mid-day prayer outside the Russian Consulate ; then he ordered his Cossacks to hoist the flag with as much ado as might be, that the truculent priest might know that there was no question but that he had come to stay. You will call this proof of masterfulness a mere straw, perhaps. Well, so do not I : but even if it were, straws the merest show which way the wind blows ; and whether it blows from the Caspian Sea, or whether it blows from the Persian Gulf, is of moment to us in learning the direction of the giddy weathercock of public opinion in Persia. The proof of the Russian influence lies in the treatment that Russian subjects receive. Blessed is the European, however meek, who has a Russian servant, for he might pluck with impunity even the truculent *mullás* of Kum by their beards, following the example of the Zill, who had been ever wont to

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treat the priests of Islám with cool and refreshing contempt.

If the late Mr. Greaves, who was barbarously done to death while in the service of his country, had been protected by half a dozen Cossacks, he might have slept as peacefully in his tent as in a Russian fortress. If Mr. Gentleman, after his attack of smallpox, had engaged a Russian subject as his road-servant, he would not have been robbed of his kit on his journey from Bushire to Shíráz. If the Rev. Mr. Garland had been accompanied by a Russian body-servant on his lonely walk from the Isfahán bank-house to the Jewish Ghetto of Djubareh in that city, he would not have been insulted by the street urchins, much less would he have been mobbed, and spat upon, and hustled into the presence of Hái Sheykh Muhammad 'Ali over the sacred threshold of his mosque : a noteworthy instance this, and one of such unprecedented significance of the lengths to which fanaticism will drive the people, that a brief narrative of the episode may interest those who believed that no human consideration could induce a Persian mob to thrust defilement upon one of their places of worship.

The *mullahs* of Isfahán are of the Church Militant: they are for ever preaching to the people in their mosques that it is not lawful to buy European goods, nor to serve the Firangís in any way whatever. The two ringleaders are Hái Shekyh Muhammad 'Ali and Aghá Nijaffy. Their

## The Cat on the Footstool

contention is that the Europeans are carrying things with too high a hand. Hence to humiliate them should be the duty of every good Moslem. To that end they proposed to formulate some plan which should restrict the Firangís within bounds. Of course, this pulpit oratory was directed mainly against the members of the Church Missionary Society and their doings, but reacted upon the rest of the European community. That it had considerably influenced the Persian masses was shown by Mr. Garland's adventure. On the 17th of February, 1898, he was walking home alone from the Isfahán bank-house to the Djubareh Ghetto, when a crowd of boys made a dead set at him, insulting him beyond all human endurance. All that Mr. Garland did by way of retaliation, was to cuff one of them playfully over the head ; but the effect was somewhat startling. The urchin threw himself down, screaming at the top of his voice that the Firangi had killed him. Mr. Garland walked on, but was soon overtaken by a howling mob, who surrounded and dragged him into a mosque before the notorious Háji Sheykh Muḥammad 'Alí. The *mulla*, on hearing from Mr. Garland a faithful statement of the truth, decreed that a payment of ten ashrafis should be made by him to the boy. Mr. Garland retorted that the priest had no dominion over a British subject, and requested that a letter should be taken from him to his Consul, Mr. Preece. A cooly in the service of the Persian Gulf Trading

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Company, a British enterprise of the first importance in its kind, came to the front at once, and volunteered to serve as messenger ; after which the Sheykh left the mosque, and Mr. Garland started under escort to the residence of the Ruknu'l-Mulk, who in the absence of the Zillu's-Sultán, was deputy-governor of Isfahán. No sooner had the missionary got outside than he was again attacked so fiercely by the mob that his custodians had to hustle him into the "sanctuary" of a stable-yard. Eventually he was allowed to return to his house in the Ghetto. When Mr. Preece arrived, it was to take Mr. Garland to the British Consulate. Both Mr. Preece, British Consul, and Mr. Tweedy, Managing Director of the Persian Gulf Trading Company, despatched strong telegrams to Teherán, and the Zillu's-Sultán was summoned home from his shooting-box at Ghameshláw. It was hoped that the British Minister would use the incident as a lever to force the Government to send the two priests on a distant pilgrimage, but his masterly inactivity bade him wait until something "serious" should occur—a fatal blunder in Oriental countries.

These instances might be multiplied ; but the three already mentioned, occurring as they did in the British sphere of influence, go to prove all too plainly that our prestige in Persia is languishing from the want of a little blood and iron in the constitution of our imperial policy. These three instances alone clamour for a more active expenditure

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of energy by the gentlemen who hold sway over our interests. These gentlemen, if they would devote themselves as whole-heartedly to their diplomatic duties as they do to polo, would not be long in driving the ball of British fair play into the goal of British aims. Such misadventures as I have related never happen to Russian subjects in the north, nor did they befall British subjects in the south when Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, by his capable handling of the reins of diplomacy, brought about a memorable “recrudescence of British activity and power,” and when, at a somewhat earlier date, the Zillu’s-Sultán had been armed to the teeth against them. They should have the effect of a charge of electricity on our free-and-easy diplomatic corps in Persia (1898–9), and on our Government at home they should have the effect of a summons to arms. The men of Fars, tired of snoozing, these fifteen years past, in the cradle of the Persian race, would reach out a warm hand of welcome to the friendly nation that would teach them to be themselves once more. They yearn, as did their ancestors of old, to bequeath to their descendants the stuff whereof history is made. To that end the drill-sergeant and the engineer are wanting. The Zillu’s-Sultán came the drill-sergeant over them to good purpose at one time. Unless we look alert, the drill-sergeant of the Continent will be on the ground before us, and British prestige will be one with the ruins of Persepolis.

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But I am strong in the hope that the policy framed by our present Viceroy of India, in the days when he was sowing his seed broadcast over the face of the East, shall yet be the active policy of our Government at Westminster, when they shall have scattered their chaff to the four winds of heaven. And when that day comes, I hope they will bear in mind that there rules, as Governor-General of Isfahán, a Persian Imperial Prince who proved at the height of his power that a virile spirit, making for progress and freedom, informs the character of the men of the south. That we raised not a diplomatic forefinger to support this Prince in the hour of our danger and his need, but allowed him to be stripped of his power to farm our sphere of influence, "with the cordial consent, if not at the actual suggestion, of Russia," is a blot on the scutcheon of our Persian policy that it is not too late to wipe out yet. Persia gained nothing by the Zill's downfall, nor did we. Our acquiescence was vain, shifty, purblind. It was a throwing up of our hands at the dictation of Russia ; it was a surrender of our rights to protect our best friend ; and a shameless repudiation of our duties towards our closest allies, the Persians of the central and southern provinces. If the Zillu-Sultán had been a traitor, he would not have submitted himself to his father's will. If he had been a weak ruler, he would not have been allowed to retain the governorship of Isfahán. And if Persia has gained even the smallest advantage from his downfall, how

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is it that what remains to him of his sphere of influence, is the best-ruled territory in Persia? No, no; it were wiser to acknowledge a blunder which has been the means of hastening the aims of Russia, than to insist upon the infallibility of our judgment. We were not slow to curry favour with the Zill in the days of his power. It is un-English to kick him when he is down. There is not a single European of any nationality in the south of Persia who would confirm the latter-day British official wholesale condemnation of his character. I won't deny that the Zillu's-Sultán has many blots on *his* scutcheon—probably I know his shortcomings better than any European living,—but the worst of these, the alleged “murder” of the Ilkháni of the Bakhtiyáris, a popular and forcible character, was committed by order of his father, Násiru'd-Dín Sháh; and, furthermore, he has gained immeasurably in foresight and prudence during the last fifteen years. All the features of his face make for determination and governing ability. The haughty brows, the broad square forehead, the firm mouth, the combative jowl, the unyielding chin, and the long fleshy nose,—all these are of a piece with the stubborn back of the man, which looks as if it had never been bowed in a *selám*. Only the eyes of him tell, perhaps, a somewhat different story: shrewd, astute, calculating, they are the index of a mind whose first impulse it is to distrust the appearance of truth and fidelity in human nature; they are suspicious, apt to imagine subterfuge in the frank, and selfishness

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in the disinterested ; they show him to be quick to discern the mean and contemptible, and slow, very slow, to pin his faith in what seems to be upright and trustworthy : in a word, he is a keen judge of bad character, and would tell you that it is wiser to deny than to believe, since all men are liars under the Persian sun. On the other hand, he can be true to such friends as have proved their loyalty, and knows well how to bind them to his soul with hooks of steel.

But have we stood the test of his good faith ? If he were the governor of a northern province, Russia would know both how to use his energies and how to check his impetuosity. In his 'prentice years he made his father a present of a great and efficient army : if that army is neither great nor efficient now, whose is the blame ? Given the opportunity, there is no saying what the Zillu's-Sultán might not achieve in his maturity if our Government would only realize that his interests jump with ours, and ours with those of the Central Government ; and if his Majesty the Sháh would turn a deaf ear to such political intriguers as would fain call in suspicion the allegiance of his brother, who is only too eager to work heart and soul for the welfare of his country and his King.

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